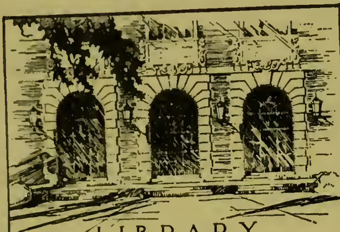

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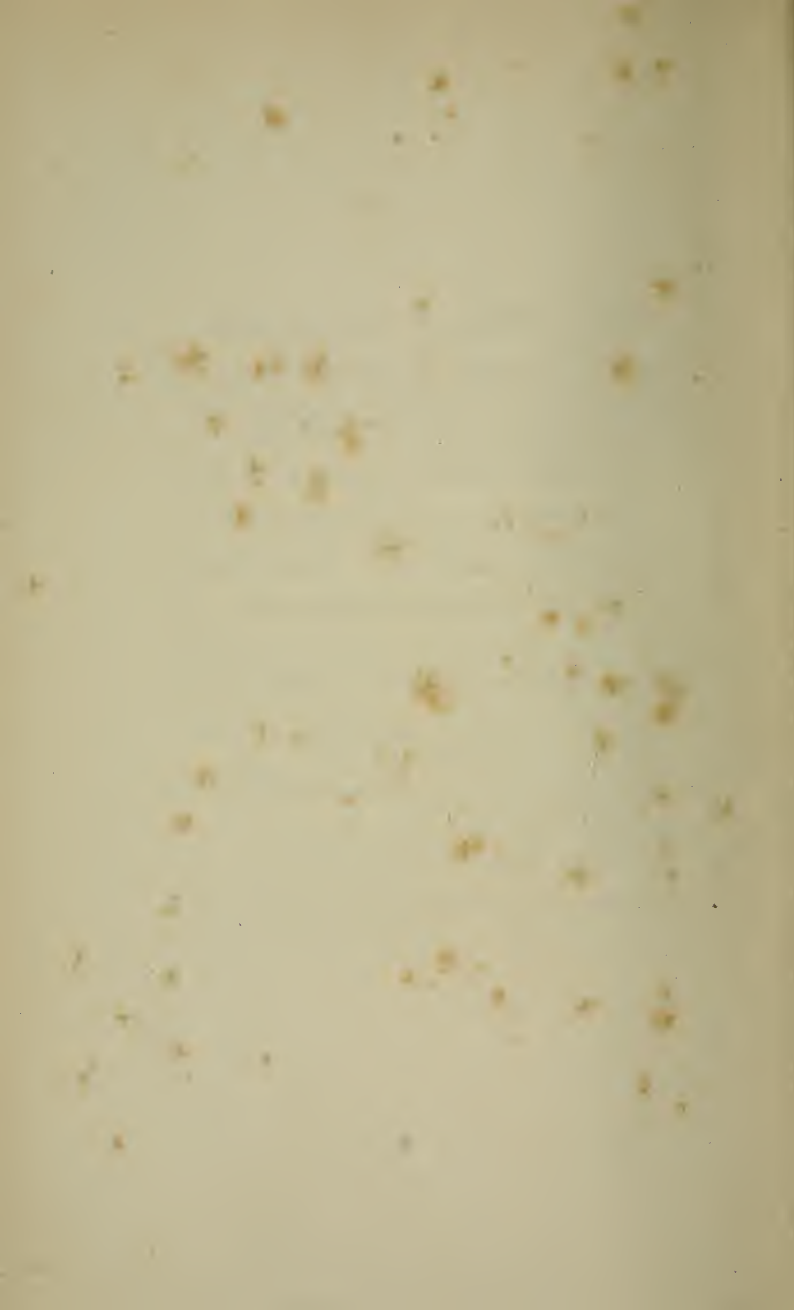

THE

# BURDEN OF ISABEL

VOL. III.

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THE

# BURDEN OF ISABEL

BY

J. MACLAREN COBBAN

AUTHOR OF 'THE RED SULTAN' 'MASTER OF HIS FATE' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

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# THE BURDEN OF ISABEL

## CHAPTER XXX

### RUMOURS OF EVIL

It happened that on a certain evening at this time—while the two aspirants to her hand were both striving their utmost, in their own way and without her knowledge, to win her worthily—it happened that Isabel was invited to a political dinner at her uncle's. The dinner was going to be, her aunt told her, a very important affair—something in which the fate of parties or of ministries was involved; for the Suffields were now very important people. They were going on from

strength to strength in the way determined by Mrs. Suffield. Mrs. Suffield's native dignity and breeding, and Suffield's simplicity and goodness, recommended the household in quarters where they might otherwise have been looked shyly on; for even the merely worldly and the cynical are touched by gentle and transparent worth. Their social ambitions were fulfilled with little striving—they were aided a good deal by their connection with the Padiham family, and even with Isabel—and, though Suffield himself set no store by their fulfilment, his wife set much. Suffield was a good, easy man that would have been content to let the world slide and look on with a friend or two; but his wife would have him in among the throngs and agitations of men. She was not satisfied with his Parliamentary progress. He had attended regularly, but he had not spoken once; and she strongly suspected from the odour of his

coat that he spent a great deal of his time at the House in the smoking-room. (The fact was, he and his racy Lancashire stories were great favourites there.) She saw no sign that he was working to become a leader of his party, and she urged him if he would not speak to try to bring himself forward in some other way.

'I'll sit on a Committee if you like, Joan,' said he with good-humoured resignation. 'Will that suit you?'

'Suit me, George? Will it do yourself any good? You ought to go on an electioneering campaign with somebody. Your platform speeches are always successful.'

'Too successful, they tell me, my dear. I make the audience laugh so much, they'll listen to nobody else, and I don't speak up enough for the party.'

'Well, dear, why don't you?'

'Because, my love, I'm not built that

way. But, Joan, my dear, I tell you what I'll do: I'll give political dinners. Do you like that?—with you to settle the guests? If that don't suit you, Joan, I don't know what will—unless I can somehow prevail on the Queen to dissolve Parliament, and send for me to form a Ministry.'

So it was agreed that he should give political dinners; and this was the first to which Isabel was invited. The party was large, so that the conversation between any pair was little likely to be attended to and taken up by the whole table: there was something of the privacy of a crowd about it. Lord Clitheroe had taken Isabel down to dinner, and presently—they had a frank and friendly regard for each other—he began to speak of a matter that arrested her attention.

'It is lucky,' said he, 'that I was asked to take you down, Miss Raynor, for I wanted very much to talk to you; and it will be so

much easier to talk now than afterwards, when people are dodging about, and in and out of the drawing-rooms. Don't, please, look startled or indignant with anything I may say: we don't want to attract notice or inquiry.'

'It should be something very interesting and piquant that you have to say,' observed Isabel, 'judging from your introduction.'

'It is more than interesting,' said he seriously; 'it is of the greatest consequence. Do you ever, may I ask, hear from your cousin George?'

'No,' answered Isabel with a blush, 'I don't.'

'Well,' continued Clitheroe, 'I have learned, quite in a private way, that he is concerned in very risky cotton speculations.'

'I know nothing about such things, of course,' said Isabel; 'but do you think that is likely to be true?'

'I know it is true,' answered he. 'The fact is, between ourselves, I have seen evidence of it with my own eyes. You know—or you may not know—that I am partner in the Lancashire bank which takes charge of the Suffield money, and I have seen large cheques and acceptances which leave no doubt that he is engaged in risky cotton speculation with one or two very doubtful foreigners. You will understand I am telling you this quite in confidence. Perhaps all the danger of it does not strike you; but he has no business to be engaged in speculation at all, and that particular kind of speculation is likely to be most ruinous, especially to a man who cannot give all his attention to it. It is even possible—if he goes on—that he may in a short time ruin his proper business and ruin his father along with it.'

Isabel looked at him shrewdly, and he blushed under her look.

'Do not, please, misunderstand me,' said he. 'I am not anxious on my own account. I would marry Phemy whatever happened—though I have no doubt I would have trouble with my people. I am anxious on George's account, whom I like—he is a very good fellow, though a little too strongly convinced of the accuracy of his own judgment—and on Mr. Suffield's account, who is the best man in the world. I would speak to George myself about it, except that I am afraid of being misunderstood; and of course it would not be fair to speak to Mr. Suffield. That's why I have spoken in confidence to you.'

'You think I should speak to him, or write to him about it?'

'I know,' said Clitheroe, 'he thinks more of your opinion than of that of any one else in the world.'

Isabel did not answer: her thoughts had taken a peculiar bent—a bent which became

apparent in a conversation which she held a little later with a legal luminary. After dinner there was a 'reception'—a 'reception' which was more and less than a polite function; for it was a party gathering on the eve of the division on a great debate. That night was a Government night when 'Interim Supply' was taken, and therefore members felt free to desert the House. They fluttered in and out and buzzed in corners of the Padiham-Suffield drawing-rooms, great men and little men, 'grave old plodders' and 'gay young friskers,' discussing the situation and the prospects of the division. The men came and went; but the ladies stayed on with tolerable steadiness, to see the ever-popular party chief.

Isabel was by no means what would be called a 'political woman'; but she took 'an intelligent interest'—a much-abused phrase—in all human affairs; and politics being pre-

eminently human and mundane, she took an interest in politics. That is the least that may be said for her. Her admirers—and they were legion, for had she not beauty and wit and wealth?—thought her a paragon of political understanding and acumen, and declared it was a pity she was not 'in the House'; for then she would have been certain of the reversion of the party leadership, so sure and complete was her knowledge of men and her tact in dealing with them. Such things as these, and many more, were said that night as Isabel moved to and fro, catching the eye of all—the admiring eyes of the men, and too frequently the envious eyes of the women—by her remarkable stature, carriage, and beauty.

'Let me introduce to you, my dear Miss Raynor,' said the Countess of Padiham, who, though old, was an active political person, 'Sir Henry Dobbs, the eminent Q.C., you

know; he is longing to know you: he has heard so much about you.'

So Isabel was introduced to the eminent Sir Henry Dobbs, a middle-aged gentleman of heavy aspect, but of light mind. He made puns, and quoted sentimental love-verses. He asked Isabel about her Home for Aged Governesses: he was much interested in it, he said, because he had an aunt who was an Aged Governess. Isabel explained to him all her method of managing her Aged, and of cheering and brightening their lives. 'Admirable! Admirable!' exclaimed the eminent Q.C.: he approved enthusiastically of every detail, and gaily offered to join her Aged in a dance some evening.

'Your whole scheme, Miss Raynor,' said he, 'seems to me remarkably, unusually, wise and humane and original. If you need any help, pray say so: I shall have the extremest pleasure in sending you a cheque.'

'Thank you very much, Sir Henry,' said she. 'At present the venture is all my own; though,' she added, 'I may by-and-by have to ask my friends to help me. And if I ever make a will, Sir Henry, I shall ask you to be trustee for my Aged.'

'My dear Miss Raynor,' said Sir Henry, 'in all probability you will outlive me, but still I am prepared to do whatever you ask me. And a will?—of course, you must make a will.'

'Must I?' said she craftily. 'But suppose I wished to give my money away while I lived: what must I do then?'

'Write a cheque,' he answered laconically.

'Is that all?' she asked.

'Do you really wish to know?' he asked.

'Well,' she laughed, 'it would be useful to know. And it is so pleasant to think you are getting legal advice without paying for it.'

'To make the transfer quite safe and legitimate,' said the lawyer, 'you must ask the consent of your trustees, if you have any, and execute a Deed of Gift.'

She parted from Sir Henry, and though she had said little to him—being, indeed, much preoccupied—Sir Henry spoke of her as the most charming and brilliant young lady he had ever met: she was bright and beautiful, and she had listened to him with attention and understanding. She went home very soon, and entered her drawing-room.

'Don't go to bed just yet,' she said to the maid who had admitted her and who turned up the light; 'I should like you to run to the pillar-post with a letter in a few minutes. You won't mind, will you?'

She sat down at once to her writing-table to compose a letter to George. She found it a more difficult task than she had anticipated: to avoid appearing too warmly inter-

ested in him, and yet be cousinly, affectionate, and frank; to express the fear that he was embarked in dangerous speculations, and yet not stir in him resentment and suspicion. She accomplished it, however, with tolerable satisfaction, and sent it to the post by her maid. But still she sat at her writing-table—sat with her chin in her hand, and the lace of her sleeve falling away, like foam of the sea, from her white, rounded arm. She was thinking closely, thinking of that matter which had occupied her ever since Lord Clitheroe had said that George's present course might end in her uncle's ruin. It had come on her at once like an inspiration—with the joy as well as the suddenness of an inspiration—that if that should happen, there was one clear thing for her to do. She had had, ever since she had grown to woman's estate and could understand her past situation, a passion of gratitude deep

beyond expression towards her uncle and aunt, but especially towards her uncle, for the care, the expense, and the love they had lavished on her deserted childhood and youth. She had refused, so soon as she was able, and maintained her refusal, to quarter herself longer upon their kindness and love. It had often chafed her in thought that she could not in the smallest degree repay their care and bounty. Now there was promise of an opportunity, which she received with an expansive and abounding glee: if her uncle and her aunt were brought to poverty, she could give them wealth! She would transfer to them the fortune which Uncle Harry had left her, and she herself would turn to again and earn a living for herself and her father—her Aged need not suffer, for there were many friends ready to help her to maintain them as they were. What should she do?—return to school-teaching? She was not fond of teach-

ing. Alan Ainsworth had once told her she ought to be a novelist. Who knew? Perhaps she might become a novelist, or, at any rate, a writer of some sort. From that she fell to thinking of Ainsworth, and then of George; and so she went to bed.

Next day there came in a singular fashion a suggestive indication that Lord Clitheroe's suspicions of George's speculation were not astray, and that even George's father was somewhat troubled in his mind concerning his son.

A question had arisen respecting our administration of a certain part of India; and there was expected a debate in the House of Commons on Indian affairs—a great debate, for which Suffield, with the help of his Secretary, had prepared a great speech. All the Suffield contingent in London declared its intention of being present in the House in honour of the occasion, in spite

of the protestations of the prospective orator. Mrs. Suffield, her daughter, and Isabel sat behind the grating; the Tame Philosopher—and Alexander also, as having a tender interest in all that even remotely concerned Miss Raynor—sat in the Speaker's Gallery; and Lord Clitheroe was prepared to listen from his place in the House. But the lively hopes of all were blighted. Mr. Suffield had resolved, and communicated to his friends his resolution, to speak after Mr. So-and-So, who was an ex-Cabinet Minister and a great debater. At the end of the speech next but one before Mr. So-and-So was expected to rise, Mr. Suffield walked lightly and cheerfully forth, doubtless to enjoy a whiff of tobacco in the smoking-room. He came back just as Mr. So-and-So rose, but he was changed. He looked so anxious, worried, and absent-minded, that the three ladies glanced at each other with inquiry in their

eyes. At the expected time all were ready to hear Mr. Suffield's vocative of 'Mr. Speaker.' Mr. Suffield rose—with no great alacrity—at the same moment as Colonel Lukyn, an austere veteran tanned with the suns of India; seeing the Colonel up, Mr. Suffield gave way at once; and the Colonel caught the Speaker's eye and began his speech. Mr. Suffield glanced furtively and plaintively round the galleries, as much as to say, 'What could I do?' The Colonel's speech was stiff and prosy; the House grew impatient; it had had enough of the Indian debate, and began to utter irritating cries of ''Vide! 'Vide!' which grew steadily more persistent. When the Indian Colonel sat down, the debate collapsed, and the division was taken.

When Mr. Suffield met his friends a little later, he looked rather foolish. 'Well,' said he, deprecatingly,' it didn't come off—did it?'

'It certainly did not, my dear,' said his wife with sharp energy. 'And I begin to doubt whether it ever will.'

'Oh, my dear,' said he, 'we'll try again some day.'

'Why,' said she, 'did you give way to that red-faced Colonel?'

'Well, Joan,' said he, 'to tell you the truth, I felt he knew all about India, and I felt I knew nothing about it.'

'Fiddle-de-dee!' said Mrs. Suffield. 'Haven't you known Harry, who has told you about India?—haven't you in your service a native of India?—and don't you do business with India? Surely you might have a better, a more unprejudiced view of India than a red-faced Colonel who only spent his life there!'

'I am not so sure of that, Joan,' said Suffield. 'If a grocer had a brother that worked in a mill, and if he once or twice sold

me a pound or two of sugar, would he be a fit and proper person to pronounce an opinion about my business, and say it should be managed this way or that way?'

'George,' said his wife with conviction, 'you'll never do in politics.'

'Oh,' said Lord Clitheroe, 'Mr. Suffield will do very well yet. A man sits and funks it for a long while, and thinks he will never catch the House of Commons way; and then he stands up to say half a dozen words once, and finds he has got quite the run of it, and says half a dozen thousand words instead of half a dozen. Now, there's me: I haven't spoken yet.'

'Oh, you're a goose!' exclaimed Phemy. Lord Clitheroe smiled.

'It is fortunate, uncle,' said Isabel, 'that making House of Commons speeches is not a means of grace, for you would be in a poor way.'

'I don't know why you badger father so,' said Phemy. 'I am sure it must be much more amusing to say "Heaw! Heaw," or "'Vide! 'Vide!" as Clitheroe does, than to get hot making speeches!'

'Amusing, child?' said her mother. 'Men are not members of the House of Commons to amuse themselves!'

'Oh, aren't they?' said the artless Phemy, with a mischievous glance at her betrothed. 'I thought they were.'

'To tell you the absolute truth, my lad,' said Suffield to Lord Clitheroe, as they walked out to their carriage, he leaning on Clitheroe's arm, while Isabel walked immediately in front of them, and so overheard his words: 'I went into the smoking-room for a whiff, and there was a man—one of the Liverpool members—saying that there are still strong suspicions down there that some person is trying on a "corner" in cotton, a

foreign creature called Gorgonio—do you know him?'

'I? No!' answered Clitheroe.

'I thought you gave a start when I named him. George knows him, though—we met him in the summer in Douglas—and I wondered, if there is a "corner" likely to be on, and he knows of it, why he hasn't told me. And if he doesn't know, he ought to know, to lay in enough cotton in time; for about th' end of th' last "corner" prices went up, so that I couldn't afford to buy, and had to put the mills on half-time.'

'Why don't you write to George about it, Mr. Suffield?' asked Clitheroe.

'Well, I did write to him a month or so ago, when that article of M'Fie's appeared. And his answer was pretty much "Stuff and nonsense!" I don't like to write again in a worrying way; because, you see, he's young, and if you want a young horse to go well,

you mustn't *tew* at the reins. But that bothered me, and I couldn't think of my speech. It was like a bit of grit got into the delicate machinery of my brain, and it wouldn't let my speech unwind. I think I'll go down and see George: that'll be best.'

To Isabel that seemed evidence of far stronger quality than it really was that the ruin of her uncle was imminent. Her imagination held steadily before her the anxious, troubled face of her uncle when he re-entered the House after his brief absence, and touched it with anguish and pity.

'Poor uncle!' she said to herself. 'To lose all that himself and aunt worked so hard and for so many years to get together! Dear, dear uncle! Oh, how glad I am!—how I thank God!—that I am able to do something for you!'

She wrought upon herself such a vivid impression that the voluntary surrender of

her wealth was near and actual that, when she reached home, she sat down by her drawing-room fire and considered the details: her father must be removed from his present retreat—her heart sank a little—and she must give up her pleasant home. In short, as the details rose before her, the surrender, though sweet and ungrudged, was painful. Was that strange? She was a good, generous girl, but she was quite human; and she had enjoyed the advantages of wealth for so short a time that its novelty and attractiveness had not worn off. It is easy to commend the simple joys of hard work and contented poverty; and the wealthy man or woman who has worn himself or herself out with the cares of this world and wearied his or her appetite with their indulgence, may think with longing of rest from care in a little cosy parlour with a supper of bread and cheese. It is even easy to endure poverty with cheer-

fulness when you have never known aught else. But when you have known hard, thankless work, and eaten of poverty till its grit has set your teeth on edge, and then have passed away from them both—why, then it is a very painful prospect to surrender leisure and wealth when you have but tasted how sweet they are—how 'good for food,' how 'pleasant to the eyes,' and how much 'to be desired to make one wise.' Moreover, Isabel was cleverer than most of those who suddenly come into the possession of wealth, and she had wide views of the satisfaction its use can bring. We have seen that from the first she did not think only of self-comfort and self-indulgence: she planned and spent with generosity and charity for others. But during the few months she had held her wealth she had learned the far-reaching power that wealth invests its possessor with —power for good and power for evil. An

equally shrewd, but a less courageous, woman, perceiving that, would probably have shrunk from the responsibility of doing anything for fear of doing evil, or have timidly let her wealth and influence flow into channels that are traditionally and conventionally good; but Isabel ventured to have notions of her own of what it would be good to do—notions which were as yet but inchoate and shapeless, but which must be now entirely abandoned.

She looked round the room in which she sat. She liked it: it was comfortable, luxurious, and rich; it pleased her eye and her artistic taste, and it satisfied her fancy. She had got it all together herself; there was not a thing around her that she had not taken pains to choose, to discover, and to acquire. Everything—even the cushion against which her back rested—had a little history of its own. Must she give all these little things up, which had become like outlying fringes,

tassels, and ornaments of her life? And these curious trinkets of rare Indian and Chinese workmanship in gold and gems which belonged to uncle Harry, and which now adorned her neck and arms—must they be surrendered?

Was it strange that the expectation of losing all these things should cause her a pang? Was it not, indeed, right that it should, and yet that she should not hesitate, even in thought, in her intention of surrendering them? She said to herself steadily, 'They must go!' not once did she murmur, 'Can I not keep them?' The passion of sacrifice was upon her, and its pain only made it the more worthy and pleasing. At the same time its pleasure was enhanced by the thought that if she were once stripped of her wealth, Alan Ainsworth would cease to hold aloof from her, as he had persistently done of late—he had even excused himself

from attending her uncle's House of Commons function, though she had herself asked him—and might come to her with the magic glow of love on his cheek, take her hand and say, '*I* need you now!'

She went and sat down at her writing-table, and, moved by this ferment of thought and feeling, took from a drawer that journal of her uncle's which was his last bequest, and in which she frequently read. She opened the book at random now and prepared to read. But she paused, with her finger in the place, and thought how strange are the turns of circumstance, how unaccountable that element of surprise in life which men call 'The Irony of Fate!' Why, for instance, should it have so fallen out, first, that Uncle Harry's wealth should have come to her, and then that she should have to give it up after a few months' possession?

Thinking thus, she happened to fling the

board of the book back to open it again. The board thus flung aside showed something she had never noticed before: that upon its inner side was a flap or pocket. She thrust in thumb and finger and, to her surprise, drew out a sheet of notepaper—a few sentences of a letter which Uncle Harry had begun and addressed to herself. She read all the sentences again and again, but these stuck to her memory: 'It would please me much, if you can see your way, that you should marry George, as he and his father desire. He is a worthy young man, but obstinate and over-confident, and there is no woman can help him and guide him better than you.'

Coming at that juncture, the words struck Isabel strangely and solemnly—almost like a message from the tomb.

# CHAPTER XXXI

## TANDERJEE RECEIVES A CHEQUE, AND DANIEL FINDS A KEY

George Suffield was troubled by Isabel's letter, and by a gentle note from his father which he received about the same time—his father said he had heard disquieting rumours about cotton, but he would leave them to be talked over when he came down for Christmas, unless George thought there was anything of pressing importance to communicate—for they both had heard, 'on good authority'—matters, in fact, of which he had hoped that no one outside them suspected the existence. Yet it was characteristic of George that the fact of his proceedings being guessed

at or suspected scarcely made him doubt the sufficiency of the means he had taken to keep them hid: it did little more than make him angry with the 'good authorities'—whoever they were—who had been so prying as to guess or suspect. So he merely wrote to his father that he had nothing disquieting to communicate; and then he wrote to Isabel with reassurance and fervour—and in the heat of the reassurance and fervour he went on in the course to which he was committed, and from which he saw neither reason nor necessity for departing.

For the cotton business was rapidly coming to a head—coming to such a head and gathering of offence as the trusting George did not suspect. All things seemed going well. Prices had gone up and down, just as Gorgonio and George had hoped they would. And that cargo of Indian—for which George had given Tanderjee an advance—had arrived,

and had proved a conspicuous success. It had been of good quality, and had helped to raise the reputation of Indian in the market; and since there was the rumour of more of as good quality from the same quarter, it had sent down prices sufficiently to enable Gorgonio to make many more large purchases with the view to cornering. And yet prices kept very much at a steady level in their careless way; for, though many believed that Gorgonio was trying to corner, no one believed that he could—that he had either money or experience enough—but especially not money enough—to carry him through.

George was thus in very hopeful mood when, one day early in December, Tanderjee came to him in the city office of the Suffields. He carried in his hand a roll of sample cotton, which, after a brief word of greeting, he opened out before George. 'It is good—is it

not, Mr. Suffiel'?' he said. 'It is clean, soft, long. It is excellent cotton—think you not, sir?'

'It is very good, certainly,' said George, after examining it. 'Indian, of course?'

'It is Indian, of course, Mr. Suffiel'.'

'And you want me to do something with it, I suppose?'

'My people is very poor, and Mr. Suffiel' is very rich: it is what the wise say—the rich man have the advantage. My people will gladly sell you at reduced price, on the old terms, as before, again.'

'How much is there?'

'There is sufficient, Mr. Suffiel', to fill two steamer.'

'That is a great deal. I don't think I can do anything without consulting Mr. Gorgonio: I must ask him how it would affect our other business.'

'That is all quite correct, Mr. Suffiel'.

Send for Mr. Gorgonio at once: the telegraph will bring him.'

So George sent a telegram to Gorgonio, inviting him to come over at once from Liverpool on business, and Tanderjee departed for an hour or two. Gorgonio came with speed and a look of expectation, though he already knew all about the business, and had been waiting in his Liverpool office for the arrival of the summons. George set the matter before him, and he appeared to consider the carpet very deeply and closely. Then he raised his head and spoke. He begged Mr. Suffiel' to observe that the business was like this: The cotton would in any case come to Liverpool: for their purpose they did not wish more cotton to come for some weeks; but cotton *would* come. What then? Was it not better that he should have the control of it from the beginning, than be compelled to reckon with

it, deal with it, and perhaps fight with it when it came?

'Buy it, then, Mr. Suffiel',' said Gorgonio,—'buy it, and let me receive it for you, and warehouse it, and sell it gradual, by parcels, at the top price.'

Finally, George agreed to that suggestion; and when Tanderjee came in to receive his answer, he said he would buy the cotton on the former terms, and that Tanderjee might tell the Bombay people to draw on him at once for three-fourths of the amount. But Tanderjee urged a further request, with a low bow and his hand on his heart.

'My people, Mr. Suffiel', is very poor, and you are very rich; they have advise me that some money which they must pay me I will pay myself if I get the money from you. It will save the exchange from English into Indian, and from Indian into English again, and it will be very much more convenient for

me in time. So, Mr. Suffiel', if you give me cheque now for them, I pay myself, and it is quite correct.'

The statement seemed obscure, but George thought it was probably all right, and that its obscurity was only due to Tanderjee's constrained English; moreover, he had done business a good many times with Tanderjee and had always found him straightforward and correct; and therefore, being on the whole a simple, honourable, and kindly Englishman, he wrote out a cheque for seven thousand five hundred pounds, with which Tanderjee departed, leaving the air musical with his profuse thanks.

Next morning, Daniel Trichinopoly, while his master was occupied at the works, found he had business to do on his master's account in the town; and when in town, he called on Mr. Tanderjee. Mr. Tanderjee received him in his private office.

'You have come, my son,' said Mr. Tanderjee in Daniel's native tongue. 'It is well, yea, twice well; for all is ready on my part. What of yours, my son? Do you in deed and in truth bring the plans in your bosom?'

'I have searched all places, and all drawers in the office and in the house of my master, O worshipper of the Sun, but I have found nothing!'

'Ah, still nothing, my son! Still nothing, and nothing, and nothing!' said Mr. Tanderjee, pacing up and down and waving his arms, while his spectacles gleamed with distraction. 'Is this, my son, the realm of Chola that we two dwell in, or is it the realm of deceit? You permitted the son of a dog and a pig, the Gorgonio, discover our secret of the plans, so that he has demanded his share of the reward! He has said, "The knife should be applied where there is flesh!" It is shameful to tell it, and painful to weep over it! And now—

now!—there are no plans! And all things else are ready!' Tanderjee looked as if he could 'tear a cat' in his despair.

'There is still time, O worshipper of the Sun,' said Daniel sweetly. 'It is impossible that we should go away until the Festival of Christmas is upon us. And there is still one place to search and examine; but it is difficult.'

'Oh, let not difficulty make your heart faint, O cunning one! For is not the way to wealth difficult, and the door-step to riches slippery? What is the one place yet to search, my son?'

'It is the great box of iron that is called "Safe," and that stands in the office like a shrine. No man, as I hear, has ever seen it open, and when my master opens it he locks the outer door. Methinks there dwells in it the demon or spirit that brings the Sahib Suffield and Sahib George their luck!'

'You are but a fool, my son Daniel. You have learned the religion of the English Sahibs as a deaf man listens to a song. You are still in the bonds of your native ignorance. The safe is but a strong box. See; I have one, and there is no demon in it.'

He opened the door of a very small safe let into the wall over the fireplace, and let Daniel look in. But Daniel seemed scarcely reassured.

'That box, O worshipper of the Sun,' said he, 'is only a toy compared with the box I have seen. And, moreover, how know I that a little demon does not dwell in your box when it is shut up for the night?'

'The successful man knows no fear,' said Tanderjee. 'Be you successful, and you will laugh at the demons. The safe of Sahib George opens with a key, my son: where does the Sahib George keep that key?'

'It is that key, I believe, O worshipper of

the Sun, which the Sahib keeps in the pocket of his trouser, and fastened with a chain round his waist. Sahib George would defend that key with his life.'

'You must get possession of that key, my son.'

'I cannot do violence to my master,' answered Daniel. 'Moreover, if I offered violence to my master, which of us would prevail?'

'Your wits are becoming dull, O cunning one,' said Tanderjee. Then suddenly bethinking himself, and frowning, he stepped up to Daniel and shook all his fingers in his face. 'We dwell in deceit, my son! You hide your meaning under green leaves of stupidity! When the jackal becomes fat he can hunt no more: is it not so, my son? The English Sahib feeds the dog well, and it longs to dwell with him—is it not so?'

'Is it good to cut a man's throat after

gaining his confidence?' said Daniel sulkily. 'Is it well to betray a man who has fed you with his bounty? The Sahib George has given me his confidence, the Sahib has fed me with his bounty: you may take the key of Safe yourself, O worshipper of the Sun: *I* will not!'

Daniel was turning to the door, but Tanderjee intercepted him. He shook his fingers in Daniel's face; he threatened; he cursed—in Tamil—and finally he whined, for Daniel stood calmly listening to all his moods.

'Why will you make me frantic, O cunning one?' said Tanderjee. 'You mean it but for a pleasantry—do you not?—that you may see I need you as much as the carpenter needs a saw. Think you the reward I have promised is not enough, O cunning one? Is it so?'

'If a man sells his honour for a Cash,' asked Daniel, 'can he buy it back for a

Crore? I will sell my honour only for a Crore, O worshipper of the Sun, so that I may have wherewithal to buy it back.'

'You are a hard bargain-driver, O cunning one,' said Tanderjee. 'But I will increase your reward to half of the money which I have received when you put into my hands the plans.'

'Copies of the plans, O worshipper of the Sun.'

'Be it so—copies of the plans.'

Then it was arranged between them that Daniel should find means as speedily as possible to handle the key of the safe, and to take a wax impression of it, which he would give to Tanderjee, and that Tanderjee would thus get made a copy of the key, which he would give to Daniel. It was for some time a point of contention whether or not Daniel when he had discovered the plans should bring them to Tanderjee for aid in the copying; Tanderjee

thought he must; but Daniel—clearly distrusting Tanderjee—thought he need not: he was clever enough to do the copying himself in the place where he should find them.

It was now necessary for Daniel to tell first of all what key was the key of the safe. That very evening, when George sat alone at dinner, Daniel made an attempt.

'With regard, Mister George,' said he, with simple guile, 'may I be permit to ask the question: what you keep at the end of the chain which chain you like a prisoner?'

'A key, Daniel,' answered George carelessly.

'Nothing but a mere simple profane key, Mister George?' exclaimed Daniel. 'If I am not very troublesome to mention, the same time I must say it is singular and strange, etcetera, for a gentlemans to wear a key tied with a chain to the middle of his body. With

regard—I beg to excuse, Mister George—why that key do not it hang on its respected nail like other key? But it would not be an astonishment to know that it is a pet key, a key of worship, a key of gold.'

'It is in a sense a key of gold,' laughed George, taking the bright little steel instrument from his pocket, 'for it is the key of the safe.'

'Ah,' said Daniel, 'the key of Safe? And may I beg to know? "Safe" is called that great box of iron in the Sahib's office?'

'That's it,' said George, tired of the subject.

It was not difficult for Daniel—in spite of his contrary protestations to Tanderjee—to find an opportunity to hold the key a few minutes in his hand in the frequently recurring aid he gave to George in dressing or undressing; and when a copy of the key was made, it was not difficult for Daniel—not very

difficult—to open the safe, and to search for the plans, in spite of the genius of the Suffields which resided there; and when the plans were at last found, it was not beyond the powers of Daniel—had he not been carefully taught reading, writing, ciphering, and drawing by Christian missionaries?—to make excellent copies of them.

On the whole, then, there is no room for amazement that Christmas had not yet come, though it was at hand, when Daniel sent a note to Mr. Tanderjee, containing these words only: 'All is ready. Prepare.'

## CHAPTER XXXII

### ISABEL IS WAITED FOR

'No woman can help him and guide him better than you!'

Isabel repeated these words again and again, with a certain solemnity, the morning after she had first read them, and every time she repeated them she murmured, 'There is no mention of Love.' She was going to surrender her wealth—that idea was still vividly present with her—out of love and gratitude to her uncle and his family: must she now also surrender herself? The passion of sacrifice was, as I have said, strong upon her; but yet she was not then fully prepared to

make the second surrender that seemed to be due from her. She felt herself drifting into contemplation of its possibility, because, though strenuously confident the evening before, she was now very doubtful of holding on to the hopes Alan Ainsworth had created.

She went to the Home of her Aged, and partook of lunch with them; and then she drove to Victoria Station to take train for the Surrey hills to visit her father. The day was bright and warm, and she found him enjoying the December sun on a southward slope of the grounds of his abode, with a blotting-pad upon his knee, busy with pen and paper and a bagman's ink-pot. He was so engrossed with his 'Defence of Transcendentalism' that he had little to say to his daughter, and presently she left him.

When she returned to town, she found a letter awaiting her from George, in answer to

her own. He wrote absolutely a lover's letter; he could not (he said) possibly be offended by anything she might say to him; it was the ambition of his life to have her always saying all kinds of things to him; he was running some risk, of course—all business was surrounded with risks—but he had no fear of results, and what he was doing was entirely for her: he was only striving to have a fit provision for her on the day when she would answer him and put her hand in his, he hoped. Would she not come down at Christmas? He was expecting her. That generous and confident epistle necessarily had its effect. It toned down her anxiety about her uncle's future, and it rendered the prospect of obedience to what she regarded as Uncle Harry's dying request a trifle more possible and attractive. The attention and attitude of her mind were still further changed that evening. She dined at her

uncle's again—this time it was a literary dinner—and her uncle was so jovial and seemed so void of care, and the affairs of the household seemed to be so much on their usual generous basis, that—taking also into account George's letter—she felt that she had been somewhat 'previous'—as our American cousins pleasantly say—in her passion of concern about her uncle's affairs. 'How absurd of me!' she thought, 'to be so very fast! I believe there is nothing wrong at all!' And the more inclined she had been to think ruin at hand, the less inclined was she now to believe there was any likelihood of ruin: it was the natural reaction of strong feeling and vivid fancy.

But the most moving thing for her was the presence of Alan Ainsworth. Her heart leaped on seeing him, regardless of all considerations of neglect, forgetfulness, or misapprehension, and then it went out to him

when she noted how pale and thin he looked, as if worn with work and sleeplessness.

'You look ill,' said she. 'Have you been working very hard?'

'He's not burning the candle at both ends,' said her uncle with a laugh—'but he's fair melting it, like th' lad that put his farthing dip into th' oven to keep it warm. *He's* shutting himself up too much with his writing. This is th' first time I've seen him for months, I think.'

'What is the reason?' asked Isabel with anxiety. 'Is it the play that has been wearing you out? How is it going? Why don't you read it to me? I am sure I could help you with suggestions. I think I might be at least as useful as Molière's housekeeper or Dumas' fireman. You might try it on me as one of the average public, and if I went to sleep or slipped away, you would know that that particular passage would not do.'

'You would be of no use, Miss Raynor,' said he very soberly—was he cold to her, she wondered, or was he only tired?—'as a representative of the average public, I am sorry—and at the same time glad—to say. You would be too critical; you wouldn't be content to let my effects touch you or move you: you would want to know how the effects were produced; and if they didn't touch you, you would want to examine why they didn't. Altogether, you would be too curious, Miss Raynor, and would wish to take the machinery to pieces.'

'There's a character to give me!' exclaimed Isabel to her uncle, 'which, he says, he is both glad and sorry to give!'

She spoke lightly, but she was deeply hurt by his words and by his manner of saying them: if his eyes rested on her an instant, they wandered away again, as if in search of another with whom he had rather

be talking. That was in the drawing-room before dinner; and later, she was more deeply hurt still. At dinner she did not sit near Ainsworth, but afterwards they came together without his appearing to seek the encounter. They had an opportunity for confidential talk, of which he did not avail himself. Indeed, he spoke to her little more intimately than to a casual acquaintance.

'Are *you* very well?' he said.

'Oh yes,' said she in some surprise; 'I am very well.'

'I hope your father is getting on well,' he went on: 'I haven't been able to go to see him for some time.'

'Yes,' she answered; 'my father, I am thankful to say, is going on very well. He is entirely taken up,' she added with a smile, 'with his "Defence of Transcendentalism."'

Her smile was unavoidably accompanied by a wistful look of wonder concerning the



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meaning of this farce of conversation between them. He caught her look, and turned pale even to the lips, while she flushed with a burning glow. There was an awkward pause.

'Are you going to Lancashire for Christmas?' he asked presently with the merest politeness.

'I don't know,' she answered. 'I mean, I have not yet decided.'

Then her uncle came along, and Ainsworth left her and went and talked with Miss Bruno the novelist, who, Isabel could see, received him with marked pleasure. Isabel was not only deeply wounded, she was ashamed and angry. Her bosom heaved in a turmoil of amazement, disappointment, and jealousy, so that she had to move away, and compose herself alone.

Why did Ainsworth behave thus? The fact was he was afraid to trust himself in

Isabel's presence. He had to put a constraint upon himself, lest he should pour out what he longed to say, but for which the time was not yet come. Had he then uttered what was in his heart, what had once and again risen almost to his lips, much pain and stress of feeling might have been spared both to Isabel and to himself. But he held his tongue and he went away because he had pledged his word to himself that he would not ask Isabel to say "Yea" or "Nay" until after a certain event had taken place. The event was ripe, but it had not yet dropped. His play was ready, that is to say, and had been accepted for speedy trial; it was to be put into rehearsal at once, and to be produced if possible on Christmas Eve. The manager of the theatre, however, had promised only an afternoon performance, seeing that the play was by a 'prentice hand; but Ainsworth was grateful for even that. it

was, for a beginner, a chance in a thousand; and he had the assurance that if the play were successful it would go at once into the evening bill; if it were not successful—it would be relegated to the limbo of plays damned and events forgotten. Taking these things into account, he had resolved that the name of the author should be suppressed, and that none but those immediately concerned—Alexander, the manager, and the company of actors—should know who the author was. Therefore, he said nothing of the production to Isabel or the Suffields: if it failed, they would be none the wiser; and if it succeeded, they would know in good time.

Next day his rehearsals began, and what with these and his newspaper duties he was occupied day and night until the date of the play's production; so no further word had he the opportunity of saying to Isabel, until it was too late—almost.

Meanwhile, Isabel went in and out as heretofore, and seemed to the general eye as bright and charming, and as much mistress of herself as she had been wont to be. But her heart was sorely vexed. She had almost forgotten the rumours of evil likely to happen to her uncle, and she could, therefore, be more occupied with her own intimate affairs. She had ceased to be very angry with Alan Ainsworth, but she was still surprised and disappointed. She tried to find excuses for him—explanations even—but she succeeded very ill. She had thought that he had held aloof from her as a woman whom it was not for him to woo because of her wealth, and she had attempted to show him till she was ashamed that in that regard her wealth was nothing to her; she had done that from the first. Now she desperately concluded that, if he cared for her at all, he cared, as she had at first thought, with a friendly interest

merely, and by no means with an overpowering love. Perhaps the impulsiveness of his nature made his friendships with women appear warmer than they really were; at any rate in her case he obviously had no intention of urging that his friendship should be given the complexion of love. It might be, she thought humbly, she was not the kind of woman to inspire a man like Ainsworth with a passion.

In this soreness and disappointment of heart she turned with an agreeable sense of comfort to the frank and generous regard which George had for her—with, indeed, something like relief and gratitude. She perfectly understood the question in his letter concerning Christmas. Should she go down to the old hall, then, that had long been as a home to her, and please George, please her uncle and aunt—she knew it would please her aunt now—and please the spirit of Uncle

Harry, if he still knew aught of what passed on the earth which had not been too kind to him? Did she love George? She could not declare to herself that she did; but, after all, few people who married seemed to be very much in love. She could say—as Euphemia said of her lover—'He is very fond of me'; but she could not find that so satisfying as Euphemia seemed to find it. For she was not the passive kind of woman who find it enough to be appreciated and loved: she was of the rarer kind who must themselves love and appreciate. Yet she admired George's manly and masterful qualities, she respected him, and she certainly liked him. He was not the kind of man she had dreamed she would marry; but still—still, how many women married their dream, or even their first love? And so—and so she obfuscated her true sense of things, darkened her usually clear vision, put her hands before the eyes of

heart and soul, and determined she would go down to Lancashire at Christmas.

And in the halls of the Suffields she was anxiously awaited on the day before Christmas Day. George had confided his secret and his anxiety to his mother; and his mother, in motherly fashion, became anxious too; when she had last seen Isabel, she could not get her to promise to come North, and she did not profess to be able to forecast or to tell what Isabel would do.

'I am sorry, my boy,' said she, 'that I cannot give you any comfort. But I know Isabel too well to venture to say what view she may take of it. She likes you, I am sure—she has shown she does—but whether she thinks she likes you well enough . . . Bell has notions of her own that there is no reckoning with. I used to think that she and Alan Ainsworth took very much to each other; but I know she has seen little of him

for months, since, I believe, she came into Uncle Harry's money.'

George's father observed that his son would not sit down, and that he fidgeted about from room to room, and tramped in and out and considered the weather and looked at railway time-tables. 'What's th' matter wi' th' lad?' he asked his wife. 'He's as restless as a cat on hot bricks!'

Then his wife disclosed to him the secret of the cause. He pursed his lips, nodded twice, and went and laid his hand on his son's shoulder. 'Thy mother,' said he, 'has told me, lad. Keep thy pecker up, and never say die—and put thy trust i' th' Lord.' Suffield seldom used religious phrases in his ordinary speech, but when he did use them he used them with simplicity.

'All right, dad—all right,' said George, grasping his father's hand.

Euphemia, of course, had guessed the

secret already, and had her own view—which she kept to herself—of the issue. Thus the whole household waited, and watched the clock, and considered the arrival of trains. They did not enter upon this acute condition of waiting until after luncheon; for no train leaving London at a reasonable hour could arrive until about half-past two, and then there was the little appendix of a journey out of town to be reckoned. But when luncheon was passed, expectation was rendered feverish by the railway time-tables. The Suffields were in the habit of travelling by one particular line, and they knew that by that there arrived an available train almost every hour up till about ten at night. There are, however, three great railways from London into Lancashire, and when they came to examine the time-bills of all three in *Bradshaw*, the total number of suggested trains—one train arriving on the heels of

another, or outstripping another, all the day long—made their heads whirl. All but George then gave up the time-tables in despair and waited with resignation. He openly made out a list in three parallel columns of all the trains and then put the list in his pocket.

'I would go and meet her at the station,' said he, 'but she might come by the road.'

He went out, therefore, and hung about between two points of vantage in the park, whence he could command a sweeping view of the road on the one hand and of the path from the local station on the other. There were tense occasions when, with his list in his hand and his knowledge of the distance from town in his head, he could lay his finger on a narrow margin of minutes and say: 'If she came by *that* train, she should arrive about now.' But she did not arrive, and George still waited and hovered to and fro.

His father had wandered into the village to gossip with some of the old folk about their colds, their rheumatisms, and their asthmas; but his mother and sister sympathetically observed him from the windows of the drawing room.

'Brother George, brother George!' murmured Euphemia in one window, where she sat with a neglected novel in her lap, 'do you see anybody coming?'

'You should not make game of your brother, Phemy,' said her mother from the other window. 'We shouldn't watch him like this, poor lad!' And she rose and walked into the depths of the room. 'It seems like sacrilege. We should be ashamed.'

'Well, mother,' said Phemy, 'he shows how he feels very publicly.'

'It's his nature, my dear,' said her mother proudly, 'to do everything openly.'

'He must be very fond of Bell,' said

Phemy—'fonder than I thought he was. I'm sure Clitheroe never waited about like that for me!'

So it wore on till tea-time and dark. When tea was brought in, Phemy called her brother, and he came. But he would not sit down; he swallowed cups of tea, tramped about the room, and looked out of window.

'Happen,' said his father, who had returned from the village charged with news to which his wife gave but a preoccupied ear—'happen she thought she'd have lunch first—and I don't blame her—and then she'd catch that train at two—the best train of the day: it gets you here in plenty of time to get ready for dinner. That's the way to travel: from a good meal to a good meal; then you're not too tired by your journey.'

'Bell likes her meals good and regular,' said Phemy.

'Her school-life,' said Mrs. Suffield, 'got

her into the habit of having everything regular and up to time.'

'Bell is the only woman I know, except mother,' said George, 'that can appreciate the whole of a good dinner. Most women don't care what's set before them: they seem always to prefer tea and talk!—Tea and talk!' he exclaimed with great contempt.

'Quite so, my lad,' said his father. 'And it's very bad for them; but they won't believe it.'

'Isabel,' said Mrs. Suffield, 'knows what's what: I must say that for her. She eats well and wisely. She knows that good food makes good blood; and that good blood means good life for herself, and the chance of good life for her children after her—if she has any.'

Upon that all were silent, and George went out again—though it was dark—to his sentry-duty between the two points. But still Isabel came not—came not even by the train her uncle

had reckoned upon her taking—and the dark became illumined by the moon, and the stars twinkled to see George still at his post. When the moon covered all things with her mystic light, George went in and dressed for dinner. Train still succeeded train on his list, racing madly with each other; she might arrive just before, or just at, or a little after the dinner-hour. Dinner was put back to await her, and they all sat—all save George, who hung about out of doors with an ear for every sound—all three sat, dressed, hungry and silent, in the drawing-room.

'He'll get his shirt-front spoiled with the damp,' said Mrs. Suffield; 'and those birds will be done to rags with waiting!'

Phemy laughed, and her mother frowned, and the mantel-clock struck half-past eight.

'Let's have dinner in, Joan,' said Suffield. 'She has very likely arranged to come by the dining-car express.'

'There are three of them on the different lines,' said his son, who had just entered, 'all within ten minutes of each other.'

So they went to dinner, and ate it with little gaiety or enjoyment.

'If she doesn't come by one of those three,' said George, striving to make up his mind to a definite conclusion, 'she won't come to-night.'

'Oh,' said his father. 'Then we can go to bed when we want to. She won't come till to-morrow now—if she come—and to-morrow's a bad day for travelling. What did you say about coming when you wrote to her, lad?'

'I didn't expressly invite her,' answered George with a blush. 'I just asked her if she was coming.'

'Oh, in that case,' said his father, 'happen she doesn't mean to come—not that I mean to put you out of heart, my lad,' he added hurriedly; for George had turned very pale,

and had pulled his brows together. 'But, well—there you are, you know.'

'If she had not meant to come, she would have written that she was not coming,' said Mrs. Suffield decisively.

'Don't let us discuss it, mother,' said George.

Isabel did not come; it was past eleven, and all were thinking gloomily of bed, when old Tummas, the butler—Daniel was gone for a holiday—entered with what he called a 'tally-graft:' it had just been brought to the back door by a special messenger. George tore it open. 'Am coming by night train,' he read aloud; 'shall be with you early in the morning.—ISABEL.'

'The night train!' exclaimed Mrs. Suffield. 'It is not very seemly for a young lady to travel by night!'

'Oh, it's all right, mother,' said George cheerfully; and it was only now, when it dis-

appeared, that the weight of his anxiety became apparent. 'Though you know well enough that when she wants to do a thing, Isabel is not the one to think whether it is seemly or not. The trouble, however, is,' said he with a laugh, 'that she doesn't say which night-train; there are three of them, as of the others!'

'Ah,' said his father, 'I've had quite an education to-day in trains; I had no idea that there was such a big, three-cornered competition, and that there could be so many people wanting to run up and down between this and London!'

George consulted his time-tables again, and took his resolution, and went out for a little to give an order to one of the grooms, and then they all went to bed.

At three o'clock on Christmas morning, in the dead, cold waste of what was still night, George Suffield stole softly away in a dog-cart,

like a midnight marauder. He had told no one his errand, and he drove on softly on the grass till he thought he was out of ear-shot of the house, when he flicked his mare with the whip, saying, 'Now, my girl,' and dashed away out of the dark and down the high-road leading to town. He was going to meet Isabel. He would wait for first one night train and then another until she came, until he saw her coming forth to greet him, 'fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.' In truth, he trembled at the mere thought of meeting her alone—trembled, half with joy, wholly with expectation. Did she, or did she not, understand how he would interpret her coming? Did she *quite* understand?

The first train arrived at four o'clock at one station, laden with jovial passengers. But Isabel was not in that train. The next train arrived at a little past five at another station,

and thither George leisurely drove to wait. Slowly, with leaden feet, the minutes and the quarters passed, but at length the engine glided into the station and ceased its motion with a great sigh. George singled out the Ladies' Sleeping Car, and just as he reached the door, Isabel stepped out upon the platform. Not many ladies could have borne the ordeal of being thus seen immediately at the end of a cold night journey; but Isabel could bear it better than most, and it was not the consciousness of being seen under untoward conditions that made her blush so deeply as she did.

'So, Bell,' said George, grasping her hand and embracing it with both his, 'you have come.'

'Yes, George,' said she ; 'I have come

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### 'LOVE THE GIFT IS LOVE THE DEBT

When she and her luggage were safely bestowed in the dog-cart, when she had been well wrapped in rugs, and when they had dashed out of the station into the raw darkness, then Isabel thanked George for coming for her.

'Nobody knows I've come,' said George. 'We waited all day yesterday for you, and were just beginning to think you were not coming at all, when in came your telegram.'

'But that made it all right—did it not?' said she.

'Well,' said George, with a joyous laugh,

'nearly right. But you didn't set down what line you were coming by: there are three lines, and each has a night train.'

'How foolish of me!' she exclaimed. 'And you have been waiting about for three trains!' She considered him a moment, as if she found him a more eager lover than she had bargained for. 'I found,' said she, by way of apology, 'that I had a good many things to do yesterday, and I thought I would take the night train for the sake of having a new experience.'

'So like you, Bell,' laughed George, 'to want a new experience!'

'Is it?' said she simply. 'I suppose it is.'

When they were well out on the clear highway, and one hand was enough to hold the reins, he put down his other hand to seek hers; but she affected not to understand his purpose, and let her hands remain hid. The mare knew that she was going home to a

bran-mash, and she spanked along at such a rate that speech was impracticable; so the two sat silent, and wrapped against the cold air; and mound and tree, cottage and bush, fleeted fast away from them, looking merely like blacker features and articulations of the general darkness.

None of the household—save a groom to take charge of the mare—was astir when they arrived. Isabel retired at once to freshen herself with a bath and to change her dress. She did not come down till the breakfast bell rang; and then, when she had made her apologies and explanations, there were presented to her a great surprise and determining shock.

They sat at breakfast, when Mr. Suffield, who had been running his eye up and down the columns of 'The Lancashire Gazette,' murmuring the while 'H'm! Ha!' suddenly exclaimed to the table in general: 'Bless my

soul! Now, what do you think of this?' And then immediately to Isabel in particular: 'What do you think of this, Bell?'

'Well, what is it?' cried all.

'It's in "Our London Correspondence,"' said Suffield. 'Listen: "The unequivocal and brilliant success of 'The Backbiter' at the afternoon performance yesterday at the Variety Theatre has compelled the management to disclose the name of the author. The audience insisted with stamping of feet and reiterated cries of 'Author! Name! Name! Author!' and the manager stepped before the curtain, and said that the author was not in the house, but he would give his name—'Alan Ainsworth.'" There!' said Suffield. 'What do you think of that? Did you know his play was going to be produced yesterday, Bell?'

'No,' she answered; 'I did not. I did not even know it was finished.' She had an

overwhelming sense of pain and desolation, as if this were the final cut that severed all connection betwixt herself and Ainsworth; he had not thought it worth his while to give her his confidence, even in this small matter. She had come down extremely doubtful what answer she should give to George; now she had no doubt whatever.

'"The play,"' Suffield resumed, '"will be placed at once in the evening bill of the theatre; and while the enterprising manager may be congratulated on having secured a piece that is certain to run for many days, and to take a place in the repertory of the theatre, Mr. Ainsworth is no less to be felicitated on having in all human probability won fortune as well as fame. Mr. Ainsworth was known, though it may be but anonymously, as a brilliant member of the staff of this journal until less than a year ago, when he was invited to assume a responsible posi-

tion on the metropolitan press. Mr. Ainsworth has shown he can do admirable work; and his friends, of whom the present writer has the privilege of counting himself one, are confident he will go far." There!' cried Suffield, slapping the paper on the table. 'What do you think of that?'

'The hand is the hand of the London Correspondent,' thought Isabel vaguely to herself; 'but the voice is the voice of Alexander. He deserves his success,' said she aloud; 'he has worked hard for it.' She spoke quietly but frankly, and no one guessed there was the pain of separation at her heart.

'I always said,' observed Mr. Suffield, 'that Alan would turn up trumps; though he might have let us know about his matinée. Let's spend a shilling—it's Christmas, you know—in congratulating him.'

'And he's going to make his fortune!' said Mrs. Suffield meditatively, with her eye

on Isabel. 'I have heard that a very successful dramatist makes in these days of high prices and "No fees" as much as fifteen thousand a year!'

'No, mother!' exclaimed Euphemia.

'That must be a *very* successful dramatist, indeed, my dear,' said Mr. Suffield.

'What about this telegram of congratulation?' said George.

They discussed the wording of the telegram for some time; for Mr. Suffield—who had found a telegraph form and a pencil, which he meant to use himself—would hear of nothing but 'Many happy returns.—*Returns*, don't you see? There's nothing a manager or a playwright values so much as *returns*, and *many* of them.' It was at length conceded that the phrase upon which he had set his heart should stand, but that there be set in front of it this: 'We congratulate you on the production of your play.' That

done, they all signed it, as if the handwriting could be transmitted, in manner following: 'GEORGE SUFFIELD; JOAN SUFFIELD; EUPHEMIA; GEORGE.'

George paused, before handing it to Isabel, to count the words. Reckoning the address, there was only room for one word more to complete the shilling's-worth. 'There is only one more word wanted,' said he; 'you had better sign "ISABEL." That will do very well,' he added with a smile; 'it will look like a Suffield manifesto.'

Isabel did not like it; but she wrote as was suggested, saying to herself, 'What does it matter?'

After breakfast she went into the garden with Euphemia, and sauntered up and down among the flower-beds, as we saw her at the beginning of this story; but the beds were now bare and waste as her heart. There George soon found them, and seeing him

coming, Phemy found an excuse for leaving Isabel, and she prepared for what she knew was coming.

'Do you remember?' he said. 'It was last Whitsuntide that I saw you and Phemy here; it was in the beginning of the day that I spoke to you of something. Do you remember?' he asked.

'Yes,' said she with self-possession; 'I remember it.' She remembered, too, that on that occasion she had come upon Alan Ainsworth in the conservatory.

'I asked you a question then, Bell, and you put me off; and then I begged that I might put it again in a year. It is less than a year; but I have found a year too long to wait. Tell me, Bell, am I right in thinking that you *quite* understand why I have asked you to come here this Christmas?'

'Quite,' she answered.

'Then,' said he, intensely moved, 'I may

ask the question?' He took her hand and paused; the pause was not long, but it seemed long to Isabel.

'May I take the question as asked?' said she, looking down and making arabesques with her toe on the gravel.

'Bell!' he murmured. 'Then—then you accept me?'

'I do, George,' she answered. For an instant she looked him frankly in the face, and then dropped her eyes again.

'Oh, my dear!' he exclaimed, and folded her in his arms before she was aware.

To that she submitted; but when he ventured to press closer and to seek to kiss her, a sudden dislike of his embrace seized her, and she put him away. 'Not now, George!' said she—'not now!' and fled into the house.

George might have thought there should have been more in the asking of a wife than

he had found; but if he did think so he did not show it. He went about exuding happiness. That he had come to the understanding he desired with Isabel was apparent; yet it was formally made known to his parents. Suffield took Isabel aside to welcome her as his prospective daughter-in-law.

'I'm glad, my dear,' said he, pressing her hand; 'it's what I've wished for. Though lately,' he added, 'I had got to think that it was going to be Ainsworth.'

It was a busy Christmas Day. They all went to church in the morning, and exchanged greetings and salutations of 'Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!' on this side and on that. They returned to find the post-bag just arrived: the post is always late on Christmas Day. The bag was crammed with Christmas cards and greetings addressed to every member of the family;

for the Suffields now had troops of friends. For Isabel there was but one; yet even that she was surprised to receive, for she had told no one she was coming to Lancashire for Christmas. When she recognised the handwriting of the superscription, her heart beat ominously; it was Alan Ainsworth's. She opened it before them all, recklessly, for they all were occupied with their own communications. Her envelope contained a letter as well as a card of greeting. She read the letter eagerly, greedily. 'I owe you,' it ran, 'and my good friends with whom your servant has told me you are staying' (he had called, then!), 'an apology for the business of this afternoon. It seems rude and ungrateful, perhaps, but my only reason for not confiding to you the secret of the production was that I was afraid the play might fail. That was why I also suppressed my name. I don't think I could have looked any of you in the

face again if you had known, and all the world had known, that it had failed. I know you will all rejoice with me that it has not failed, and that there seems the prospect of a long run before it. There are seats ready for you as soon as you are ready to accept them. Are you returning to town soon? I wish to see you to explain matters.'

When Isabel read that aloud—except the final sentence—to the family, George was silent, and frowned a little, though no exception could be taken to anything he had heard read.

'We're going back to London on the last day of the year,' said Mrs. Suffield; 'we have several engagements to fulfil. Will that suit you, Bell?'

'Oh, quite,' answered Bell.

The rest of that eventful day was crammed with gaiety and feasting. A good many guests came to dinner, and after dinner

there was merry dancing; and so the time passed without thought. It was not till she had retired to her room very late that Isabel had leisure to consider what she had done, and who she was. She was the affianced wife of her cousin George! She had promised to marry him!—to tie her life to his! She did not shudder at the thought of him; she was only dully miserable. This seemed to her a very poor conclusion to have reached. She was like a religious enthusiast who, after having had visions of heavenly glory, dreams of a divine presence and expectations of fulfilled prayer, suddenly finds himself shut in with a mere reality of earth, which causes him to doubt all he had formerly believed, and to despair of all he had formerly hoped for. When she had lived her simple, tedious, untrammelled life of schoolmistress, what thrills of joy were hers, what dreams of happiness! It was only now

she recognised how much she must have dreamed, when she knew she was tied to a reality which was the fulfilment of nothing she had ever dreamed of or had longed for. Oh, what romantic visions she had had of heaven and earth filled with delight—of Love that with its light and warmth would blend all the varied experiences of life into one Joy—of 'Love the gift, and Love the debt!' Now all that was done with; the whole world was become gray and dull, and shrunken to a wretched round of going out and coming in, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking; and she herself, in her folly and blindness, had wilfully chosen this result! No one but herself was to blame! Why had she been so precipitate? Alan Ainsworth promised explanations! Perhaps she had misunderstood him!

'Oh, my love! my love!' she moaned in her anguish, pressing her hands to her eyes

as she paced up and down her room. 'What have I done? What *have* I done?'

Yet George seemed satisfied and happy. He was not to blame; and how could she take his happiness from him? She knew, now that she had been put to the touch, that she did not love him at all, as a woman ought to love a man with whom she means to identify her life; but that was not because he was unworthy of her love. She now saw, too, that in committing outrage on herself she was doing wrong to George, who by her was prevented from knowing the unreserved, romantic love of another woman! Yet George was happy in loving her and in believing she loved him.

Next morning she went down to breakfast, resolved to show no sadness or regret: it would be the merest selfishness to trouble others with her vain feelings. It was remarked that she looked pale and had dark

circles under her dark eyes ; but she declared it was nothing ; she had not slept well, she said, and her head ached

The day was filled with engagements ; a midday dinner in the school-room to the work-people, and a tea afterwards to the children, and, last of all, a family visit to the theatre. But yet there were intervals for private conference of which George assiduously tried to avail himself. He sought to enjoy the accepted lover's privilege of sitting close to and embracing his mistress ; but these endeavours Isabel did her utmost to defeat. And George was not offended ; for he set her conduct down merely to the coyness usual in a maiden. Isabel made one or two faint efforts to shake his belief in her.

'Are you quite sure,' she asked once, 'that I am quite the woman you ought to marry?'

'Look here, Bell,' said he ; 'don't ask

such absurd questions: they are not suited to my intelligence. I have not known a great many women; but I don't need to know any more to be able to tell that the woman I have chosen is the one woman in the world for me.'

After that, what could she say that would not be simply a repudiation of her promise to him?

At the same time she was troubled with the necessity of sending Alan Ainsworth an answer to his question: when would she be at home? Should she write to him that she was engaged to marry her cousin, and she had better communicate with him no more? But would not that be attributing an intimate importance to the situation which he might fail to understand? She ended by sending him a line merely; 'I shall be home on the last evening of the year.'

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### 'EVEN SO!'

On the last night of the year, after dinner, Isabel sat with her aged companion, waiting. She sat with 'The Sand-paper Review' in her lap, from which she had been reading a very grudging and supercilious criticism of Alan Ainsworth's play. A tall lamp was lighted, and diffused a soft, rich glow through its wide flounced shade of amber-coloured silk. Isabel was arrayed in a golden-tinted tea-gown of the material which ladies know as *crêpe*, and her abundant dark hair was arranged with a seductive negligence peculiarly her own. She wore no ornament

but her beauty; her only jewels were her dark, lustrous eyes. When she rose to go to the piano, the yielding material of her gown subtly suggested the lovely lines of her supple but superb figure; and her expression of meditative melancholy gave her more than a touch of imperial repose, which seemed to crown her with perfection. She had resolved to tell Alan that night of her engagement to her cousin George; and to soothe her mind and nerves, strung high with expectation, she now lighted the shaded candles, opened the piano, and sat down to play from Mendelssohn's 'Songs without Words.' From these she passed to the beautiful air which Mendelssohn wrote for Burns' exquisite song:

> Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
> On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
> My plaidie to the angry airt,
> I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee!

She was thus occupied when Alan Ainsworth entered. She ceased at once, and rose to

greet him, and the aged companion discreetly slipped away. He looked much more festive than usual. He was attired in evening dress, which became his tall, lithe, broad-shouldered figure much better than it becomes most figures upon which it is seen; he had a white flower in his button-hole; his fair hair was somewhat rumpled; and there was a flush of excitement on his cheek, and a sparkle of excitement in his eye. When she saw him, she forgot all the pain and constraint of her last meeting with him.

'Why!' she exclaimed, 'you have shaved!' Yes; his moustache was gone; and there was revealed a strongly curved lip which suggested stern resolution and a something else which Isabel could not name.

'Yes,' laughed he freely; 'I have. I suppose it's the influence and the example of the men I've been mixing with lately.'

'Are you so easily influenced?' she said,

still considering him. 'I don't like it!' she exclaimed, without thinking whether her liking or disliking it mattered to Ainsworth.

'If you don't like it,' said he, 'I'll shave no more; 'I'll let it grow again. Shall I?'

Isabel felt that the air was becoming electrical, and she moved to the window to open it, saying: 'I think you had better.'

'Let me do that,' said he, following her. 'Though it will be an hour or two before the bells ring out the year.'

He opened the window, and stood by it with her. He looked at her; he had been looking at her since he had come in, but his look had been the only homage he paid to her appearance. Now, however, he spoke, saying; 'That is a very becoming gown you are wearing;' and he blushed when he had said it. 'I haven't seen it before.'

'Have you not?' said she, with a spice of mischief in her manner. 'Are you sure?'

'I am sure,' he answered. 'I know all the frocks and gowns I have ever seen you in, and all the frills and furbelows.'

That was a fuller answer than she had expected. But though disturbed she was not displeased by it; and she began to perceive very plainly that it would be difficult to tell him of her engagement to Cousin George. Though the air still felt very electrical, she moved away from the window.

'Come and sit down,' said she, 'and tell me about your play. I have been reading what "The Sand-paper" critic has to say.' And she took up the paper and sat down; and Ainsworth sat down near her, with an evident consciousness of being near.

'Don't say "critic,"' said he; 'say "fault-finder." For the whole Art of Criticism, according to "The Sand-paper," is the Art of Finding Fault and Pooh-poohing.'

'I remember,' said Isabel with a smile, 'a certain critic in Lancashire, less than a year

ago, who was a good deal troubled because his editor complained he was too much given to finding fault: *he* thought he was only a judicious critic.'

'Your thrust,' said he, with a laugh, 'is quite fair. But whenever I *did* find fault——'

'You did it,' interrupted Isabel, 'with the best intentions in the world. And hasn't "The Sand-paper" Fault-finder done that?'

'No,' said Ainsworth decidedly and almost angrily; 'he has not. He has done it because we had a passage of arms some time ago in the papers, when I called him a "wooden nutmeg," said he measured everything with his office-ruler, and in effect hinted he didn't know how to either write or be honest!' While saying that, he took the paper from Isabel's hand and rolled it up lengthwise till it was of the similitude of an office-ruler.

'See,' said Isabel with a bewitching smile, 'how these writers love one another!'

'You would have read an at least more civil notice in "The Sand-paper,"' said Ainsworth, 'if my name had remained suppressed; the manager made it known quite without my leave.'

'You told me in your note,' said she; 'but I don't quite understand why you suppressed your name; at least, I don't see that you had sufficient reason for it, and especially for keeping the date of the production hid,' she added in a tone somewhat aggrieved.

'No; you don't understand that,' said he; 'but I could not put it all in the note I wrote you.'

He unrolled and rolled again the paper in his hands, and looked at her with an earnestness which made her at once fear what he might say, and yet long to hear it.

'When I began that play,' said he, looking

at the paper, which he rolled and unrolled, 'months ago, I began it with a very definite object in view. I worked at it day after day and night after night with my eye on that object. Sometimes I should have liked very much to come and discuss it with you, but that did not suit my purpose; it had to be planned and written all by myself, without suggestion or help from another. My immediate purpose was to make, if possible, a popular success.'

'Oh, fie!' said Isabel, scarce knowing what she said. 'To seek a popular success is reckoned very unworthy—is it not?—and is very unfashionable among literary people!'

'I have no patience,' said Ainsworth very earnestly, 'with that shallow and absurd pretence! It is good and pleasant to know that very many, instead of very few, people like your work, if so be you do your work honestly. Why should it be thought less worthy to touch the hearts of the simple many than to

tickle the heads of the knowing and cynical few? But it is not really so thought. It is all a pretence, made by some men to enable them to bear up against the disappointment of having their work received with indifference.'

'You think,' said Isabel, half consciously endeavouring to lengthen out his explanation, to postpone that end which alarmed while it fascinated her, 'that it is a case of "Nolo episcopari?"—"I don't want to be a bishop: I wouldn't be a bishop if I could."'

'It is,' said he. 'I know men who are pining and fretting for a popular success, and who yet—or, perhaps, I should say "therefore"—are constantly sneering at what I heard one call the "humiliation" of popularity. Mind you, if a man sets himself to win popularity, and wins it by insincere work and false sentiment—and he does sometimes, for the big public is not well able to distinguish

between the false and the true—then that man is to be denounced and bullied. I can honestly say,' he continued, 'that my work was not done insincerely. I set myself at the first to expound a subject that would appeal to many, and to express sentiments that would touch many, and then I wrote it all as sincerely and as well as I knew how.'

'I really believe you did, Mr. Ainsworth,' said Isabel. 'I don't think you could be insincere. If you had written insincerely, I have no doubt you would have failed.'

'I *might* have failed!' said he, with the look of a man who had escaped a great peril. 'If I had failed you would have heard of me no more. That was why I kept the thing from you.'

Again he looked at her earnestly and long. She returned his look, with something of dread in her eyes; and her breath began to come fast and thick, and her breast to heave under

the soft folds of her gown. Then he fell to rolling and unrolling the paper again.

'I think,' he continued in a low tone, 'that I *would* have failed—I was so despondent about it sometimes—I would have failed but that I had a great inducement and inspiration to go on.'

He paused; and she, in her dread of the pause, said lightly: 'What? The hope of fame and fortune?'

'Fame and fortune!' he exclaimed with a laugh. 'As for fortune—look here: I have just come from the treasury—the treasury of the theatre.' He took from his vest-pocket a folded paper, unfolded it, and handed it to her: it was a cheque for sixty pounds. 'That,' said he, with a shy touch of simple boyish glee, 'is for this week. I shall get a similar slip of paper every week. Is not that fortune?'

She was inclined to be offended, till she

looked in his face and saw the boyish pleasure expressed on it; and then she understood that he had but impulsively set that before her, even as he would cast all his tribute at her feet.

'So,' said she, with a deliciously sharp sense of wilfully misunderstanding him, 'you have now got all you worked for?'

'Worked for?' he exclaimed. 'What? That?—That is but the sign or token of the real, the intangible, end I had in view! Don't you understand? Haven't you seen that I felt bound to become as much of your equal as I could be? Have you not seen that? Now, now,' he said softly, letting the paper drop and taking her hand impulsively, 'I come to you.'

'Oh,' said she, closing her eyes, 'I must not let you speak like that. It is wrong! It is wrong!' A shudder as of horror passed over her, while she grasped his hand convulsively.

'What have I done?' he said. 'Have I been a fool?'

'Oh no! It is not you! It is myself! It is myself! I should not have listened to you! But it was so sweet to hear you!'

'Isabel! Tell me!—tell me frankly! Do not shrink from telling me out of mistaken kindness! If it be that you do not love me—that you cannot——'

'Oh yes,' she cried—and gave him one wild look—'I love you, my dear! I love you! No, no!' she cried—for he had kissed her hand, and now sought to embrace her, to kiss her lips—'you must not do that!' She rose hurriedly, and paced to and fro, and he rose too. 'I should have told you at once!—I have sinned against heaven! I have sinned against the light! But I did not understand!—I have been living in a vague dream! I have been as if walking in sleep; but one word from you would have waked me! Oh,

my dear, my dear! why—why did you not say that one word to me?' She threw herself sobbing on his breast for one brief moment, while he strained her close. Her wild emotion tended to produce in him an intense calm. He strove to see and to think clearly.

'Tell me, tell me,' he murmured. 'Is it that something has happened while you have been down in Lancashire?'

With one great sob she released herself to answer him. 'How foolish and vain a creature a woman is!' she exclaimed. 'I thought I understood! I thought I was wise! I thought I knew perfectly what I was doing! But I did not.—Yes; it was in Lancashire.'

'Your cousin,' said Alan, 'said last Whitsuntide that he would ask you again in a year.'

'Yes, yes,' she answered; 'you remember: you heard him, and then I saw your look!—It was in the conservatory.'

'And he has asked you—though it is not a year?'

'Yes, yes,' she answered again. 'I was asleep! I was blind!'

'Isabel! My own! my life!' said he, seizing her hands, 'you must give him up!—You are not married to him?' he cried in sudden alarm.

'No, no!' she exclaimed with a shudder. 'Oh no! Not that!—Not yet!'

'Then you must give him up—you must, my sweetheart! my love! You must!'

'How can I? He is not to blame. And he is happy in my promise. How can I destroy his happiness?'

'And how can you destroy your own happiness—and mine? See, my own! my dear! To go on with him will be to commit the sin unpardonable! It will be nothing, and will breed nothing, but misery! If you should marry him——! Do you think that a

husband will not quickly find out when his wife does not love him?—A loveless marriage! A loveless life! A loveless family! Into a loveless family—children with the cold affections of a fish!—discord comes, and envy, and dislike! So fools and worldlings marry, and so the earth is filled with strife! If you had loved him, and not me, I would have gone away, and said no word! But can I see you, my own, my beloved! put your feet on this horrible way that leads to hell upon earth, and not try to hold you back by every means in my power? I love you!—you love me, and I will not let you go!' he said, as he drew her to him again, and she sank her head an instant on his breast. He kissed her hair.

'No, no, no!' she said, resuming possession of herself. 'This must not be, my dear. I am losing myself!—I am forgetting! There is another thing that has troubled

me—that has helped to lead me asleep—asleep and blind, my dear!—into this great sin.'

'What is that?'

She swept to the writing-table, unlocked it, took out Uncle Harry's Journal, and from its pocket drew the sheet of note-paper. 'You know this book?' said she. 'You have read some of it. It is Uncle Harry's last Journal. Two or three weeks ago I found that in this pocket. Read it.'

He read it slowly—a first time, and a second; and then he looked at her. 'Your uncle says, "If you see your way"; did you see your way, my dear?'

'I thought I did. I was carried along fast asleep—and blind!—I heard at that time that Uncle George might be ruined—by speculation!—I thought you were quite indifferent to me; and I resolved to give up everything—my money and myself both—to

the family that had loved me and cared for me all my life long!'

'You were going to surrender both yourself and your wealth? Might not your wealth have been enough, my dear?'

'The money is not needed—there is no ruin threatening. But the last time I saw you you were specially cold and reserved with me, and I could not endure it.'

'I was wrong, I see,' said he; 'I have been wrong all through!—Proud, conceited fool I have been to imagine it was necessary to make myself your equal in wealth!'

'Your error is nothing to mine!' she said. 'But I did not understand, until it was done, what a horrible thing I was doing. I was asleep!—You had said no word to wake me!—And I believed that you were thinking we ought not even to be friends!'

'O my Isabel!' cried he, taking her hands in his, 'how dear and sweet you be-

come when I see you can make a mistake too—and a big one!'

'This is more than a mistake,' said she, shaking her head.

'Now, my sweetheart!—my dear!' said he, 'I refuse to take this tragically. This'—turning and fingering Uncle Harry's unfinished letter—'has no right to influence your decision. Will you be guided by my advice?'

'Yes,' said she, with a touch of abandonment in her manner; 'advise me, my dear—advise me!'

'Give the money up—as you had intended. I also have heard suspicions of dangerous speculation on your cousin's side—I suppose that is what you mean—and the money may be needed soon. Then say to your cousin: "I have no fortune! We thought I had!—Let our engagement cease! We both made it under a mistake."'

'No, no, Alan!' she cried. 'Surely, surely, that would be mean! You do not understand him! You are not just to him! I believe he loves me truly! That's the pain of it—the pain of giving him pain. To wrong him, and then to insult him!—That would be to insult him!—No, no! I cannot do that.'

'The pain of it is,' said he, 'that some one must be pained.'

'Then,' said she, 'I should be that person. It is I who have done wrong! I should suffer! But then,' she added, with a thin appealing smile, 'you would suffer too, would you not?'

'So,' said he, 'out of your own mouth, my love, I can show you what you must do. Which is better? That he should suffer pain for a little—from having lost a woman who did not love him—or that we both should suffer all our lives long?'

'Then,' said she, sitting down wearily, 'what about my dear uncle, and my aunt, and Phemy? I shall hurt and offend them.'

'Do you know,' said he, sitting down by her and speaking with decision, 'what I shall do? *I* shall tell your cousin that you do not love him—that you cannot marry him. And then, my dear—then I will carry you off, whether you will or no.'

'Yes, yes! my dear, my dear!' she cried, resting her head against his shoulder. 'Take me away! Make me go with you! But, no, no!—That would look as if I ran away because I was afraid! But help me! Decide for me, dear! I thought I was strong, but I am not! I have no decision—no will. Do not leave me to myself!'

'My sweet one, my dove!' he murmured, gently caressing her. '"Who comes to me as to her haven!"—Shall I tell you what you must do first? Get rid of that money!—I

hate it! It has come between us since ever it appeared!—Get rid of it! Make your uncle take it!—One thing at a time. Will you try to do that, my sweet?'

'I will, my dear.'

'So let us say no more about it now. I will come in to-morrow—shall I?—to-night you should rest. Your nerves have been too much tired.'

'Do not go yet,' she murmured. 'It is not late. Stay with me a little!'

'I would stay for ever and ever, my dear,' said he. 'Would not a little music soothe you? What was that you were playing as I came in?'

'Oh yes!' said she, rising at once and going to the piano. 'It is beautiful. You shall sing it.'

So they sat down in tolerable calm. She played the air, and he—who was not a practised singer, but who was ready to do

aught to please her—sang the song after a shy failure or two. The last quatrain he sang to her with point:

> Or were I monarch o' the globe,
>   Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
> The brightest jewel in my crown
>   Wad be my queen, wad be my queen!

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE TAME PHILOSOPHER IN DANIEL'S DEN

Alan Ainsworth went to his rooms that night treading on air, singing and making melody in his heart. He loved his love, and his love loved him—loved him truly, freely, and unreservedly, as only a noble, generous-tempered woman does love. There were difficulties, to be turned rather than surmounted; but they only added a zest to his feeling, for he was in no doubt about the issue. His sweetheart had surrendered herself to be guided by him; she had sweetly bent to him; and he was a new man. He felt strong, and he rejoiced. His two

successes coming together had this great effect on him. He had been very doubtful whether the public would care for his play: and they had received it with acclamation; he had frequently been despondent in his love—had often wondered if a rare creature like Isabel could find in him anything at all—and she, who had hitherto appeared stronger than he—stronger in mind and in heart—had yielded to him as the lord of her life. So he was strong and of a good courage—of a temper to be daunted by nothing that might arise. He knew that it was rather because of her own generous quality than because of his supreme desert that Isabel had yielded herself so ungrudgingly, but yet the effect on him was the same as if his own merit and his own hand had gotten him the victory. Herein is the infinite reward of true love, that, with the flattery of feeling on the one side, and on the other—of homage and

devotion—we come to believe our poor little best qualities to be active and constant, and in so believing we cultivate them into activity and constancy.

As for Isabel—when her lover had departed, she began to brood despondently upon the pain she must give to George. It seemed more difficult than ever that she should break with him. She imagined herself going to him and saying: 'You have generously loved me, I believe, all your life, since we were boy and girl together; and you asked me to be your wife, and I have agreed and have led you to suppose that I loved you. I now find that I do not love you truly, and that I cannot marry you! For your faithful love of a life all I can give you is a broken promise!'—and she shrank from it with shame and alarm. It would be easier to write that, but it would be cowardly to seek to shun the full shame of speech;

and she could not come to speech with George at once. But, as Alan had said, 'One thing at a time.' She had promised to go to her uncle on the morrow and make him take over her money. But would not her uncle laugh at her, and think her gone mad? Yet she had promised, and she would go, and perhaps something might come of it.

On the afternoon of next day, therefore, she went to Rutland Gate. She asked the important person in black who opened the door if her uncle was in; and he replied that Mr. Suffield was not at home—was gone back to Lancashire—but that Mrs. Suffield was at home. That seemed to her strange and ominous, but she followed the footman into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Suffield sat alone, with a book in her lap, as if she were reading.

'Is anything the matter, aunt?' asked

Isabel, 'that uncle has rushed off again to Lancashire?'

'Is anything the matter, my dear,' retorted her aunt, 'that you have rushed in now, when we only parted from you yesterday?'

'Yes,' said Isabel, on the inspiration of the moment; 'for some time I have had a feeling that something was going to happen to uncle. The feeling has come and gone; but to-day it has been especially strong. *Is* anything wrong? You know all my money—all I have—I would gladly give to help uncle!'

Her aunt considered her closely, and then went to her and kissed her with tears in her eyes. 'You are a good girl,' said she. 'All I know is that that M'Fie came to him this morning with some strange story; that he was very much upset, and said he must go down to the North at once. I never,' said

Mrs. Suffield anxiously, 'never knew him do a thing like that before—go off without telling me what was the matter.'

. . . . .

While Isabel is talking with her aunt, it is necessary that we should occupy ourselves with this business of M'Fie's. He had come to the house betimes that morning, looking—as the footman said to his master—'very hill, indeed, sir—wuss than usual, and 'is 'ead tied hup!'

The Tame Philosopher had, for once, a story to tell instead of a rhapsody to deliver. But his manner of narration partook largely of the rhapsodical from sheer habit; for certainly he was too much moved and too much in earnest to be consciously choosing his words.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Suffield when he saw how pale he looked, with his head tied up in a white handkerchief. 'What in the

world have you been doing with yourself?'

'Ah, my dear sir,' said M'Fie, wringing his patron's hand, 'the pains of Gehenna have gat hold upon me! I have had an adventure, sir, which to my poor experience in that kind surpasses everything I have ever read of *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*—of barbers, and negroes, and one-eyed calendars. It is so strange that you cannot imagine it even in dimmest, most indefinite prefigurement. And when I tell it to you, you are likely to listen with incredulous ear.'

'Well, my friend,' said Suffield, 'I make no promise of listening with one sort of ear or another; but I must bargain that you tell me only the truth. Come into the library.'

'"What is truth?" said jesting Pilate,' quoted M'Fie, as he followed his patron, "and would not stay for an answer." I would have you observe, sir,' said he, when

they were in the library, 'that I am about to give you an unvarnished narrative of my adventure, and I have to bespeak your earnest attention, because it concerns yourself, sir.'

'Concerns me—does it? Well, fire away, and let me hear.'

The Philosopher was too much interested in his adventure even to correct his patron's unliterary expression. He began his narrative, and Suffield listened with interest. In effect it was as follows:

On Thursday evening—that was Tuesday—the Philosopher, having his time on his hands while his patron was making holiday in Lancashire, and having read in the newspapers of the success of his young friend Ainsworth's play, resolved that he would spend half-a-crown for a seat in the pit to witness the play and judge if the approval of the public was justified. When he took his

place in the throng waiting for the doors to open, he observed a little way in front of him a white turban. When he had pushed his way in and taken possession of a seat, he found himself immediately behind the white turban. While studying his bill of the play and his halfpenny newspaper, and considering the talk and the countenances of his neighbours before the play began, he negligently observed that the owner of the white turban—who, he could casually see, had the dark face of an Indian or Hindu—kept taking surreptitious sucks at a bottle which he produced from the pocket of the dark overcoat he wore. The play began, and he was interested in it, and incurious about the owner of the white turban, who had seemed progressing so rapidly on the way to tipsiness. But at the end of the first act, when all around began to discuss the play, the owner of the white turban began

also. He addressed himself to his neighbour, a harmless, good-natured-seeming young man, who rather encouraged than resented his conversation.

'This is silliness,' said the white turban 'I am regret that I give away my half-the-crown to sit here to listen with regard to this Do you think the same, sir? I must say the times the halls of music visited I pay one shilling—not half-the-crown—and I am handy for the pipe and the glass, and I am not squeeze by my respected ones next me. With regard this is not good, not economical. And in the halls of music they make me laugh down to my stomach, with regard here if care should be taken I make a simper of pleasure. This is silliness!'

There was no mistaking that guileless voice and that wonderful turn for correct English: a single peep round the dark man's cheek assured the Philosopher that the owner

of the white turban was none other than Daniel Trichinopoly.

'Of course—Daniel,' said Suffield. 'Taking his Christmas holiday in London, and enjoying himself in his own way. But how, my friend, does that concern me? My son told me he was in London.'

'Oh, did he?' said the Philosopher. 'Well, my dear sir, I am not at the end of my story yet. Wait, sir, and listen.'

At the end of the second act—during which Daniel frequently partook of his private refreshment—the same kind of talk was resumed, Daniel adding to such comparative criticism as he had before uttered that he knew the gentleman who had 'made' the play, and that he hoped that he and his friends were well, and that they would continue very well. As for him (Daniel) he did not care for anybody: he could spend his 'half-the-crown' or his 'one shilling' with as much freedom as

any 'Ki-lis-tian' gentleman in the Queen's empire, and—with that the play went on again.

'Still I don't see, my friend,' said Suffield, 'what the tipsy twaddle talked by Black Daniel has to do with me.'

'My dear sir,' said the Philosopher, 'you will see in a precious moment.'

It was after the third act that Daniel—being then very tipsy and communicative—drew from his inner pocket a large envelope, from which he took some folded sheets of tissue-paper. He spread them before his neighbour, and boasted of the value of the drawings on them.

'I beg to mention,' said Daniel, 'that these pictures, lines, circles, etcetera, etcetera—in red ink and in black—are with regard to a very clever machine valuable for the manufacture. With attention to these I now take away and make, and I may say I shall

have a small or large fortune by the favour of it.'

A strong suspicion made the Philosopher rise to look at these drawings over Daniel's shoulder. He discovered that the lines had clearly been first traced with pencil and then gone over with ink by a somewhat awkward hand, and that they were undoubtedly copies of drawings he had seen before. What drawings?

'Now, what drawings would you guess, sir, in your acutest and directest vein of guessing?'

'What drawings should they be,' asked Suffield, 'that I know aught about? What should be done wi' a sheep's head but make broth o't?'

'Mr. Suffield,' said the Philosopher, 'with listening to the havers of fools and rogues in Parliament, I must tell you your wits have become dulled. Your business activity, since

it ceased to be active, has lost its sharpness. What drawings should they be that I'd take trouble to tell you this screed of a story about but the drawings of your own cherished, secret machine?'

'What? The black scoundrel! He has copied the drawings, has he? That's George's carelessness! But go on wi' thy story. What didst tha do?'

The Philosopher answered he could do nothing there and then; but he considered that, since Daniel had stolen copies of the drawings for use, he could hardly intend to return to his post in Lancashire. Waiting, therefore, till the play was over, he followed the white turban from the theatre and down the Strand to Chancery Lane, where it mounted to the top of an omnibus going eastward, and he followed. The Philosopher confessed that he had no thought of committing violence—even if he had been able—he was only steadily

resolved to see where the black Daniel was going to bestow himself. On the 'bus they sat almost back to back, and the Philosopher could not but imagine that a powerful man might just twist himself round in his seat, put his arm about, and garrote the head that wore the white turban, and abstract the large envelope from the inner pocket. Thus they rode eastward and still eastward, Daniel murmuring to himself without ceasing all the way. Somewhere in Whitechapel—the Philosopher could not tell where—the white turban descended from the 'bus, and the Philosopher followed. He followed along strange alleys by queer turnings, slippery and noisome, until he began to suspect that the white turban was aware it was followed; how it had become aware the Philosopher could not guess; but the Philosopher had never before tried to be a detective. The white turban twisted this way and that, and now and then drew up in

a pause, when the Philosopher drew up, too, and caught the gleam of a bright eye from under the turban. At length the white turban disappeared into a doorway; the Philosopher moved carefully up to observe the number, when the white turban pounced out upon him, the hands of Daniel gripped his arms to his sides, and the voice of Daniel murmured: 'Ah, it is the old Guru! It is the sayer of wise things! It is the wise one himself alone without his disciple! I am regret to say that my entertainment is very little for a Guru. But with regards come to see where I have the dwelling.'

There was that in Daniel's eye and manner which hinted that his invitation was not to be refused; and the Philosopher, who was not a man of great physical courage, yielded to the gentle urgency and pressure of Daniel's muscular black hands, and went

along with him, saying: 'Certainly; I will look at your dwelling.'

'Do you know what you should have done?' said Suffield, who was now marching up and down the room. 'You should have called a policeman, and given him in charge for being in possession of property of which he could not give a reasonable account. That would have nailed him.'

'But,' said the Philosopher, 'there was no policeman to be seen; it was a terrible savage region.'

'I mean,' said Suffield, 'you should have done that as soon as you left the theatre, instead of following him all the way to the Docks; that, I suppose, is whereabout you were?'

'Not quite,' answered the Philosopher. 'But I should have denounced him to a man in blue at once—should I? I did not know,' said he despondently. 'I am not familiar

with the methods of dealing with crime and its detection. And the whole business,' he added with a flash of virtuous indignation, 'was as smoke in the eyes and stench in the nostrils!'

'However,' said Suffield, 'go on wi' thy story.'

The Philosopher passed on, while Daniel guided him by the arm into a narrow court or alley. They went on, stumbling in darkness and dirt, until they arrived at a door above which was a small oil-lamp. Daniel lifted the latch and walked in, and the Philosopher to his amazement saw he was in a place like the forecastle of a ship. The room was filled with a peculiar brown vapour or smoke, such as the Philosopher had never before seen, smelt, or tasted.

'Opium,' said Suffield.

'And that is just what it was, my dear sir,' said the Philosopher.

Daniel entered into converse in an unintelligible tongue with the Chinese master of the place, who came and bowed and grinned before the Philosopher, and said: 'Come; smokee pipee. Velly cheap; not velly dear!' The Philosopher protested that he did not wish to smoke a pipe of the obnoxious drug; that while thanking his 'friend' for the offer he would much rather not. But the Chinese master of the place insisted with Celestial politeness, and took the Philosopher by the sleeve to lead him along. The Philosopher resisted, and angrily remonstrated, while sundry dark heads with lack-lustre eyes lolled over the edge of certain bunks. At that he received a blow on the head, which made him drop, stunned: he believed the treacherous Daniel had dealt it.

'Humph!' exclaimed Suffield. 'And that accounts, I suppose, for the clout about your head. And you saw the Daniel Nathaniel

no more. I thought that was to be the end!'

'But that, my dear sir,' said M'Fie, 'was not quite the end. I came to myself——'

'It was the end so far as Daniel was concerned,' said Suffield, still marching up and down. 'He had got rid of you. And you came to yourself, I'll be bound, with being made to swallow opium smoke or a bit of opium; and they kept you there sick and sleepy, and you did not get out of that for some time.'

'Now,' exlaimed the Philospher, 'it is very clever of you to guess that; for that is just what occurred. The Celestial person made me smoke one, two pipes of his obnoxious preparation, and I could not leave the place till late in the afternoon of Sunday.'

'Sunday! Of course!' said Suffield. 'That was all arranged! The Daniel creature wanted to get away, and to make

sure that you could not come and tell me or any one else that you had seen him until he had time to do something! Where can he have gone? Why didn't you let me know at once, my friend?'

'I thought, my dear sir,' answered the alarmed Philosopher, 'that you were still in Lancashire. I wrote to your son as soon as I got back to my lodgings; and then I came here to-day, thinking that peradventure you might have heard, and come back.'

'You wrote to George! And he knows then—if he's at home! That rascal Daniel must be found, you know! I must go to the police! You'd better come with me.'

They went out together at once, took a cab, and drove to Scotland Yard. The Detective Inspector to whom they were introduced saw clearly the importance of the matter.

'The thing's not patented, you see,' said

Suffield; 'and if it is made public, or if it gets into another manufacturer's hands, it means thousands of pounds' loss to my business. So spend as you think necessary to find the black scoundrel.'

'You do not know yet,' asked the Inspector, 'if he has taken anything else?'

'I can't tell till I've seen my son, who has been managing the business. Where can the creature mean to go to?'

'Back to his own country, probably,' said the Inspector. 'But is it of any use his taking plans of machines there? He may have gone to the States; but Liverpool would have been better for that. Yet—haven't I heard that they are building cotton mills in Bombay now?'

'They are,' answered Suffield: 'and depend on it that's where he's gone!'

'Very likely,' said the Inspector; 'but we must look all round.'

Suffield returned to Rutland Gate to eat his lunch with little appetite and to tell his wife what had happened, to get a few things packed into a portmanteau, and to take the train for Lancashire.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### 'HE THAT *WILL* BE RICH!'

George Suffield, the elder, arrived in Lancashire early in the evening, and drove home at once to Holdsworth Hall. His son, he found, was away—had been away, Tummas said, since ever 'th' mester' had gone yesterday. He had left no word with Tummas where he had gone ('Nay,' grunted Tummas, 'Mester George doan't trust me wi' nought; he believes sae much i' th' black fellow!'), so that Mr. Suffield had no resource but to wait, with what patience he could muster, for his return, or for the morning.

He slept ill, and rose betimes, while it was yet dark, and went to the works. The air

was already filled with the laboured breathing of the engines and the whirr of bobbins and clatter of looms. It did him good to hear these sounds, and it made him proud, more than all the mumble and gossip, the speeches and the 'Hear, hears,' of the House of Commons. He said to himself 'Ha, ha,' like the war-horse among the trumpets and the thunder of the regiments; he shook himself together, and longed to be in among the crowds of workers, with the monstrous music of the machinery in his ears.

'I shouldn't ha' listened to Joan,' he said to himself. 'That I shouldn't.'

The old lodge-keeper stared a moment or two, speechless at sight of him: it was the first working day after the Christmas holidays.

'If here bain't th' owd mester himsen! Aw'm right glad to see tha, mon!' exclaimed the lodge-keeper, as if he were himself the

master, giving his hand to Suffield. 'Ee! but it'll set th' folk up to see yo'!'

'Thank you, John—thank you,' said Suffield, heartily shaking the hand of his old retainer. 'I'm just come down on a special matter o' business. My son, I suppose, left no word if he would be here to-day?'

'Mester George? Not he! He left no word wi' me.—But how's tha able to leave th' business o' th' country—th' making o' Laws and Acts o' Parlyment and sech? How's things, mon? For we're as ignorant here as peas in a pod.'

'Well, John,' said Suffield, 'th' Queen has not axed me yet to be her Prime Minister; nor made yo', John, a Justice o' th' Peace.' And so he walked on, while John closed the gate, laughing to himself. 'Th' owd mester!' he murmured. 'He aye likes his joke. Nae much th' matter wi' a mon as can crack his joke.'

The old 'mester,' spite of having heavy stuff on his mind, could not refrain from giving himself the pleasure of a walk through the workrooms of the several buildings. It was agreeable to him—and it would have been instructive to a stranger—to see how all faces lighted up on beholding him, and how cheerily he was greeted by those whom he addressed, managers, foremen, or operatives; the abounding goodness of his nature touched them all.

'Who's in th' new building?' he asked of a manager at his elbow.

The manager answered that So and-so was—a trustworthy person whom Suffield himself had left in charge.

'I'll go and have a look at it,' said he.

Arrived in the new building, where the special printing machines were at work, of the drawings for which Daniel Trichinopoly had made stolen copies, Suffield questioned

the manager in charge: Where were the drawings kept? In the office, the man believed. Was that rule strictly carried out, that no one but those engaged in the building and sworn to secrecy should be admitted? It was. Had the manager ever seen Daniel Trichinopoly there? Never. Where were the keys kept? In the lodge with the other keys. Suffield made little account of the last two answers; for he remembered that a year ago, when no one was supposed to be in the building or to be able to get into the building, Ainsworth had declared he had seen Daniel there.

Thence he went to the counting-house. The book-keepers and penmen in general were not come yet; there were but that clerk who took the turn of early work, and an old woman dusting the desks. Suffield marched into the inner office, and upstairs into the sanctum that used to be his own. He knew where the

plans of the new machines had been wont to be kept. He went to the safe, of which he, as well as his son, carried a key, and opened a drawer: there were the plans. He took them out and unrolled them on the table; he believed they looked dirtier, and they certainly bore marks of pencil-tracing. How could George have been so careless as to allow the Black Daniel opportunity to handle and use them?

He put the plans away—in the safe again—and then he sat down and thought. If the Black Daniel had been able to play his own rig with these plans, what might he not have done with other things? George was palpably careless. There stood an Account Book left out; and there in a drawer was a key. There might be nothing of consequence in the drawer; nevertheless—— Mr. Suffield's business experience declared that a key neglected, for whatever reason, meant a weak link

in security; and that a drawer left open was a temptation to open drawers. He went to the door and asked the clerk in the outer office, 'Does Trichinopoly come much here?'

'He's mostly up at the Hall with Mr. George, and sometimes in the city,' answered the clerk.

In the city office, of course, thought Suffield—helping with the export to India and the Straits. He was about to lock the safe up again, with the resolution to go through everything carefully with George when that young gentleman should appear, when he noticed the cheque-book of the firm lying before him—a volume which was to most cheque-books as a folio is to a duodecimo. He took it out and began to look at it. As he read one counterfoil, and another, and another, he occasionally raised his head with an amazed air, and then resumed his scrutiny with contracted brows.

'I don't understand this, my lad,' he said at length. 'There's more here than I bargained for. But I must wait.'

So he resolutely closed the book, locked it up in the safe, and took his way to the Hall for breakfast. Tummas would gossip with 'th' owd mester,' but for all that breakfast was soon set upon the table. His solitary meal did not encourage cheerful reflection. Why, he asked himself, was he sitting there alone? Had he been weak in humouring his wife, and giving himself up to the pursuit of Parliamentary honour, and had he been precipitate in handing the entire control of his business over to his son? He thought it somewhat hard; but he saw that even at fifty a man must buy his experience like the most reckless youngster.

After breakfast he sat a while, and looked at the paper, and looked at the clock. At length he rose, went into the hall, summoned

Tummas to brush his hat and coat, and set off to walk to the station, as aforetime, to take the train into town: perhaps, he thought, his son would go to the city first.

In the city office he found the manager and the clerks in their places, but no George. The manager, however, said that 'Mr. George,' he believed, was in Liverpool on business, and would probably be back after lunch; so Suffield went forth into the city to see how the world of Lancashire commerce was moving: he had known nothing of that world, except from the newspapers and the gossip of his son, for a good many months. He went to the Athenæum, and read the telegrams of news and of prices; and then he went on 'Change. He exchanged salutations and he listened, and the more he listened the more bewildered he became; he overheard whispers about cotton, which—he was certain—were hushed or changed into another venue

as he approached. One old acquaintance was franker with him.

'Well, George,' said he, 'what's the game to-day? It's ages since we've seen you here. Is it "futures" or "spot"? There's not much, you know, in the way of futures. They seem to be covered mostly by this rascal that's trying to "corner"; but, between you and me, George, I believe there's more than a Parsee or two in that corner—there's somebody behind them.'

'There *is* a corner, then, in cotton?' said Suffield.

'*Is* a corner?' echoed the acquaintance. 'But I forgot: you're only a Parliament man now. Well, there *is* a corner; and there isn't a corner: for, it remains to be seen if it can stand the January business. No man, not even Morris Ranger, can keep the market in a corner for ever. Speculation is a blessing, but not as some men speculate.

This particular corner, I believe, George, is going to become an open square. There'll be another big arrival this week, and then we'll see.' And so the old acquaintance left him.

Suffield returned to the office, where he found his son busily hearing and speaking through the telephone. He nodded to his father, murmuring aside, 'I heard you had been here, dad,' and went on with his occupation. After a little while George hung up the telephone mouthpiece and sat down.

'And what,' he asked, 'has brought you down here, dad?'

'You haven't got M'Fie's letter, then?' said the elder. 'Where, my lad, is your Daniel Trichinopoly?'

'Where?' echoed George; and the father saw the son turn paler than he had ever known him.

'Let me tell you, my lad, so far as I

know,' said Suffield; and recounted to his son the story of the Philosopher from the beginning to the end.

'Gone!—is he?' said George, gnawing his thumb, and evidently putting a constraint upon himself. 'With copies of the plans? He certainly ought to have been here to-day, and he is not! The scoundrel!—Wait a moment,' said he suddenly; 'I'll make an inquiry.'

He turned round to his writing-table and scribbled a note. He blew through a tube, and a clerk appeared. He handed the note sealed. 'Wait for an answer,' said he; 'and make as much haste as you can.'

When the clerk was gone he explained his action to his father. 'You know,' said he —'you remember I told you—that Daniel put that hundred Uncle Harry left him into the bank. He has been speculating with it, I believe, and made something more of it. If

he is really gone, he'll have taken that with him.'

'Just so,' said his father. 'And it seems to me, George, my lad, that there must ha' been a deal of speculation going on inside the firm for him to go against th' rule. When I was looking after the business myself I made it a rule—"No betting on horse-races or gambling in stocks here!" I'd seen too much harm come o' them, and I had made up my mind that no man that betted or speculated was fit to serve wi' me. I did not think, my lad, o' saying ought like that to you when I put you in charge, because I thought you had a proper, straight, clear business head on you.'

'But, my dear dad,' said George, 'everybody speculates in these days: where's the harm in speculation?'

'The great harm in speculation, my lad,' said his father, with something like sternness, 'is that it makes you unfit for proper

business. When I was a youngster I betted a sovereign on a horse; that sovereign became five; but what became of those five I never could tell: it was "lightly come, lightly go." And I said to myself, "We'll ha' no more o' this!" But harm or no harm, the thing for you is that it must be either business or speculation: the man isn't born yet that can do both properly. If he tries to do it, he comes a cropper with either the one or the other.—Hast thou been speculating?' he asked plainly.

'Well—yes, father,' answered George, much disquieted by the elder's direct question and uncompromising tone; 'I have.'

'Humph!' exclaimed his father; 'I'm disappointed in tha, lad.—Cotton, I suppose?'

'Yes, father; cotton.'

'Much?'

'Well—that depends upon what you might think much.'

'We'll go into that presently. I keep hearing about a corner in cotton: dost tha know ought o' that?'

'Yes; I know something of it.'

At that critical point the clerk returned and handed George a note.

'It is from the bank manager,' said he, when he had opened it. '"Mr. Trichinopoly himself withdrew his account on December 22nd." That's more than a week ago! It's the day he went for his holiday!'

'Drew the money and went off to London at once, I suppose,' said his father. 'Now, we'd better see that he hasn't drawn anything of ours.'

But there were reasons why George did not wish cheque-books and accounts and such-like trifles to be gone into then; he therefore proposed to his father that the serious business of lunch should be entertained first, since nothing of any consequence

could be done before the luncheon hour must strike. His father looked at his watch, considered that he was hungry, and not at all aware that the fate of his house might be involved in his decision, he said. 'Very well. Let it be lunch first.'

George knew his father's good-nature and his affection for himself, and he set himself to interest and amuse him with other matters than those upon which they had trenched. His father had told him that he wished to get back to town that night, so that his mother might not be unduly anxious; and he was resolved that his father should go without seeing any books. He kept him as long as he could over lunch, and entertained him as richly as the elder would permit, and when he could keep him no longer, he made a bold proposal.

'You'll only tire yourself out, dad, before your journey, if you go into these things.

Why not let me go through everything by myself? One person can do a thing like that better than two.'

'The second can check the first, my lad,' said his father.

'But the first can check himself,' said George, 'by going over it a second time.'

'Well, well, my lad,' said Suffield. 'Be it as thou wilt. But check thyself carefully, and let me know th' result by to-night's post. And these speculations o' thine—let me ha' a statement o' them as soon as tha conveniently can this week.'

Mr. Suffield was not so foolish as to be deceived by his son's concern for his comfort; he saw there was something the young man would rather keep from him at present, and being a soft-hearted father, he was sorry for his son, and said to himself: 'I won't be hard on th' lad. He's my only son, and if he has made a mistake he shall have the chance of

putting it right before he explains.' He had intended to return to London by the 'dining' train, but finding he could catch a train immediately, he went straightway to the station, while George returned to the office.

George set to work with energy to go through his accounts and to examine his private cheque-book—the only one to which, he thought, Daniel could have access—and tick off every cheque by the banker's pass-book. He wrote to his father that night that he could not discover that Daniel had stolen anything but the plans.

Still George was uneasy, and he went about with his brows wrapped in anxiety; for he knew that his speculations in cotton, though only of a kind which he himself would call 'daring' would probably be characterised by his father as 'reckless,' unless they were justified by their event; and their event was not yet; moreover,

Gorgonio—with whom he had been the day before—was in low spirits, for prices were hanging at a very uninspiring level. But the first thing that seriously disturbed and shook him was the discovery that Tanderjee—to whom he had sent round an inquiry concerning Daniel—was 'gone away on business,' his partner and compatriot could not say where. Where was the Parsee gone?—and why? He could not help thinking that his absence and Daniel's disappearance were more than a coincidence. The second disturbing thing was a piece of news that shook him like the blast of doom; it came from Gorgonio, and Gorgonio had thought it of sufficient importance to send it by a special messenger.—The steamer 'Rohilla' had arrived in dock from Bombay with half that consignment of cotton on which Mr. Suffield had last given Tanderjee a substantial advance; and Gorgonio and this messenger of his had gone

and examined the cotton together—bale after bale—and Gorgonio regretted much to say that the cotton was rubbish, and would not fetch twopence a pound!—Would Mr. Suffield come and see it?

'Have you seen the cotton?' asked George of the messenger.

'Yes, sir,' answered the clerk.

'And you agree with Mr. Gorgonio?'

'Quite, sir.'

'And of course you have been in the habit of sampling cotton?'

'For years, sir.'

'Then,' said George, 'I don't see why I should waste precious time at present in going to the Liverpool docks to look at it. Mr. Gorgonio can look after it: perhaps it will prove not to be all so bad when it is fully examined. Has Mr. Gorgonio,' he asked suddenly, 'seen anything of Mr. Tanderjee lately?'

'I don't know, sir,' answered the clerk.

'You don't know, then, that he has gone away nobody knows where?'

'Has he indeed, sir? That looks bad.'

'Why does that look bad?' demanded George.

'Because this is the cotton just arrived that you favoured him with an advance for, sir; and I heard Mr. Gorgonio say to-day that Mr. Tanderjee would make a good thing out of it.'

'Then,' said George, 'your master suspects that Tanderjee may have gone away?'

'Very likely he does, sir.'

The native activity and pugnacity of George's character were becoming thoroughly roused. To suspect was to be resolved. He blew through the tube by his writing-table, and a clerk appeared from the outer office. 'Are the December cheques here or at Holdsworth?'

'Here, I think, sir,' said the clerk.

He went to one of the set of drawers behind George and produced a bundle of used cheques, which he handed to George. George undid the bundle, and found that cheque for 7,500*l.* which he had given to Tanderjee—it was endorsed 'for Jamsetjee and Mookerjee, Tanderjee.' Then he took from a drawer near him his bank pass-book, and compared the date of the cheque with the date when it had been paid: the latter date was but one day later than the former. Then he turned to his clerk, who was waiting his orders. 'Take this cheque,' said he, 'round to the bank and ask the cashier to be so good as to let me know how it was paid.'

While the clerk was gone on this errand, he wrote a letter to Gorgonio, saying that he was convinced Tanderjee had wilfully committed a fraud upon him, and was

evidently gone off with the proceeds, but that he was determined to find him wherever he was; and that the cotton had better be sold for what it would fetch—if it was so bad, it would not count in the market, and therefore might serve them by inducing a rise of prices; but omitting all mention of Daniel's absence and offence. The letter finished, he gave it to Gorgonio's messenger and sent him off.

His own clerk returned from the bank with the cashier's answer to his demand: The cheque for 7,500*l.* had been paid to Mr. Tanderjee in fourteen Bank of England notes for 500*l.*, and 500*l.* in gold. That was doubly suspicious. Why had he taken so large a sum in gold?—and why had he not taken the usual means of transmitting part of the amount to Bombay?—unless he had from the first intended to levant. The next thing to do was to discover whether these fourteen

notes for 500*l.* each had been changed, and —if possible—to trace them, and so—by good luck, perhaps!—come at the whereabouts of the fraudulent Tanderjee. George looked at his watch: it was too late to ask the help of the bank that day.

But he turned to and went through his papers, and set his work all in order, as if in preparation for a long absence. Then he went home in a consuming fever of impatience and resentment, with plenty of time for reflection before him. Daniel, Tanderjee, and Gorgonio!—could it be that they had all been in league to deceive and defraud him? But no! He could not believe it of Gorgonio!—his fortune was too much bound up with his own. But Daniel certainly had been hand in glove with Tanderjee, and it was probable they had gone off together. But how had Daniel managed to get at the plans to copy them? He

went down to the counting-house when he had reached home and made what examination he could. He saw—as his father had seen—clear evidence of tracing over the plans; but nothing more could he discover.

Next day he was astir betimes. Leaving orders for certain portmanteaus to be packed and to be brought into town to meet a certain train, he entered the works while the early morning bell still rang. He went round carefully and saw that all occupations were making orderly progress, and then he took the chief manager aside and said a few words to him.

'I am going to leave you in absolute charge at present, Mr. Johnson. I daresay my father will come down to-morrow or the next day. That black scoundrel Trichinopoly, and Tanderjee, the Parsee merchant, have played the fool with me and bolted; and I

am going to find them, if I have to follow them to the other side of the world!'

'Hadn't you better leave that to the police, Mr. George?' said Mr. Johnson.

'I can't leave it all to the police: besides, the police are too slow. This is between ourselves. Good-bye, Johnson.'

When he had eaten a scrap of breakfast, he hurried into town and went directly to a telegraph office, where he wrote a message to Isabel, his affianced wife, requesting her to be at home as much as possible that day, because he *must* see her, though he could not say when. Thence he went to the bank, related his suspicion of Tanderjee, and begged them to make what inquiries they could concerning the cashing of the notes, and telegraph to him at his father's house in Rutland Gate, where he expected to be about three o'clock. He drew a hundred pounds in notes and gold, and then—after a flying visit

to the office—he went to the railway station. In a minute or two he was embarked on his journey in a white heat of rage and resentment—rage and resentment against himself, as well as against others—which was scarcely to be distinguished from an intense calm.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THREE INTERVIEWS

George snatched a morsel of lunch at the bar of the Refreshment Room on his arrival at the London terminus, and then he drove to his father's at Rutland Gate. There had been a luncheon party, and the guests were driving away as George drove up. It struck three o'clock as he entered his father's house with beating heart.

'What's up, my lad?' asked Suffield, meeting his son in the hall, and glancing at the portmanteaus being handed down from the roof of the cab.

'Come, father,' said George, 'and let us talk quick. Let these traps be left in the

hall,' he said to the wondering footman: 'I don't expect to sleep here to-night.'

His father led the way into the library, and turned, saying, 'Well, my lad?'

'Let us sit down, father, together,' said George, setting his handbag on the table and taking a seat. 'I have discovered something that has made it necessary I should come to see you at once.'

'Oh,' said his father, 'you have found something at last! I thought there should be something more than the plans for Daniel to run off with. But go on.'

'I have to confess, father, that I have been speculating largely in cotton.'

'Ha! You have!'

'I wanted to make our firm the biggest of its kind, and I wanted to make a good provision for the time when I might marry Bell.'

'You did evil, my son, and expected good to come.'

'I had read of a baker in France that developed an enormous business, because he determined not to deal with flour-agents: he imported all the flour and grain he could use, and his business grew till he had a whole fleet of ships owned by himself at work for him. "Now," I thought, "that's what we should do! We ought to import all our own cotton." I began small efforts in buying very early, though much did not happen till the beginning of the season in September. But as soon almost as I knew him, that Daniel had tempted me with his knowledge of Indian cotton, and led me on.'

Suffield groaned. 'The black man,' he murmured, 'led me on! It's an excuse, lad, as old as Adam!'

'Am I trying to excuse myself?' said George. 'I don't wish to, father. I am responsible and to blame. I only meant to show you how it all came about. Daniel was

indeed very clever. He knew all the varieties of Indian cotton, and he had picked up with a Parsee who dealt in them. You remember Tanderjee?'

'Another black man!' groaned his father. 'I wouldn't trust one o' them!'

'Tanderjee knew all about the shipments and the agents of Bombay, and, between them, Daniel and he made one or two very profitable movements. But they had very little money.'

'Daniel, I suppose, would have had none at all if it hadn't been for Uncle Harry?'

'No. So Tanderjee came to me with a proposal, first, that I should help him with money and share in his profits, and afterwards, that I should advance money on consignments at a reduced price to enable them to be shipped.'

'I see it all! I see it all! It has been done before, my lad. A kind of confidence

trick. They show you good samples, and get you to advance good money, and then they deliver rubbish! Go on, my lad.'

'I advanced three-fourths once or twice. There seemed very little risk in that, you know, father. Indian cotton has for a good while shown a better average of quality than American, and it is so well packed that there is hardly any fear of damage or loss by fire or water.'

'Go on.'

'But the last time he asked me to give him a cheque, instead of making the common arrangement to be drawn upon.'

'Confidence trick again!'

'Yesterday, I was told that the first half of the consignment had arrived in dock,' George doggedly continued, 'and on examination proved not worth more than twopence a pound.'

'What had you paid for it?'

'Fivepence.'

'And for how much did you give him a cheque?'

'Seven thousand five hundred. Now I find Tanderjee has disappeared as well as Daniel.'

'Oh, ho! He's gone too, is he? Gone together—are they?'

'I suspect so—and gone, I should think, to Bombay. Where else should they have gone with the designs for the patent machines?'

'I've been thinking,' said his father, 'they might have been taken straight to Germany for the machines to be manufactured at once and sent on to Bombay; but there's no doubt it's Bombay the whole business is meant for. But now, my lad, I suppose you've come proposing to do something?'

'Find how they have gone, and follow them! That's what I propose to do.'

'Follow them yourself? Where's the good of that?'

'Not so much for the sake of the money Tanderjee has gone off with—though that's a good deal!—as because of the plans. As you have yourself said, father, they might take them to an engineer at once. However, I've been such a fool, I'm ready to defer to your opinion of what I should do. But I've something else I must tell you first, father,' continued George with evident reluctance. 'I'm engaged now in cotton transactions along with Gorgonio.'

'What? In that cornering game of his that I've heard of?'

'Yes, father. He has no money; and I have become responsible for the payment of differences and so on.'

'You have? You scamp, George! You incorrigible scamp! To think that son o' mine should ever have a hand in the wickedest

kind o' thing that's done in business!' He gazed at his son with an anger and sternness of demeanour the like of which his son had never seen before.

'Wickedest thing in business, father? How so?'

'Hast thought o' th' other men ruined when a corner succeeds?—o' th' mills stopped, or put on half-time, wi' forcing up prices?'

'No. I hadn't thought of these things.'

'Then,' said his father, 'it's time thou did, lad! Thou'dst better get out o' that corner at once!'

'I can't, father—until the end of the month: the transactions are open till the 31st of January!'

'Get out at once, I tell tha!—and save thy character wi' all honest men!'

'But just think what will happen! Prices will go down with a rush, and we shall lose over one hundred thousand pounds!'

'A hundred thousand! Good heavens! But I might ha' guessed a man cannot back a cotton corner all by himself for less! But it must be done, lad, to save thy character and my own! I was an owd fool to trust tha wi' so much! But thou hast run thy rig, and now thou'dst better go thy ways! Thy mother and I'll ha' to go back to work and see what we can do!'

The father rose, stood with his back to the fireplace, and gazed with absent mind at the haughty lords of Padiham that glared on him from the opposite wall. The young man was thoroughly humbled. He beat his foot on the carpet, and his lip quivered.

'Don't speak to me like that, father!' said he. 'I've made a tremendous mistake, but I meant no harm!'

'I believe they a' say that, lad! But go thy ways!'

'Here's a hundred pounds I drew to-day,

father,' said George, putting his purse on the table—'to go after those black men with: don't you want me to take that? Don't you want me to go?'

'Take it; take it. A little more or less don't matter. Take it, and do as tha likes!—and go where tha likes!'

'Don't be so hard, father,' said George. 'Don't take my hope away! The bitterest thing to me is that if I don't save this, I'll have lost money that you and mother have worked hard to win! Bid me go for your sake, father! And don't burst the corner up at once, father! It will cripple your business!'

'Thou'dst best leave thy corner and thy Gorgonio to me, lad! And go and make what thou can o' thy black men!'

'I don't care for myself!' pleaded George. 'I only want to show that I can do something!—that I *am* fit to be trusted!' And the young man laid his face on his arm and sobbed.

'There, lad, there!' said his father, laying his hand on his son's shoulder and giving him an affectionate grip, while his lip trembled. 'Let's say no more, but make what we can o't. When a' is said and done, thou'rt my own son, and my only one, and what's mine is thine! Come, lad, come! Let's shake hands!' And they shook hands, while the father said: 'Thou'rt not a bad lad, but thou'rt a damn fool, George?'

At that moment Mrs. Suffield entered, and exclaimed to George: 'What's all this? I suppose your mother is of no account in the house now?'

'What dost think, Joan?' said Suffield. 'Here's our George been trying to make a cotton corner!'

'Well, and what if he has, my dear?' said his wife.

'Ah! What if he has? And what if he

loses his character there, and all th' brass into th' bargain?'

'No! never!' exclaimed George's mother, kissing him. 'He's not such a bad lad!'

'Father will tell you all about it, mother,' said George seriously. 'I must run to see Isabel.'

As he went out, a telegram was handed to him. It was from his bankers. It declared that twelve of the notes whose numbers had been sent had been handed into the Bank of England and exchanged for a draft upon the Oriental Bank, Bombay, on December 27, by a dark man who looked like a native of India.

'Daniel or Tanderjee,' said George; and returned to put the telegram into his father's hands.

. . . . . .

Isabel sat waiting for him in a condition of great agitation. His morning telegram had assigned no reason for the hasty journey

and the urgent request for an interview; so she wondered if by any means, occult or other, he had learned or divined her desire to be free of her engagement to him. When he was announced she felt herself turn pale, and when he entered and pressed her hand, she trembled so violently that George could not but note it.

'Are you ill, Bell?' he asked with concern.

'No, George,' she answered. 'But your sudden descent upon me has startled me. Is there—is there,' she asked humbly—so humbly that George was surprised at the new tone in her—'any special reason for this sudden visit? You'll have some tea?' She rose to ring the bell—and to release her hand from his.

'I must not stay, Bell. I have come to tell you something of great consequence, and then I must be off. I have been a great

fool, Bell.' (Isabel clasped her hands, and trembled afresh.) 'I have speculated in cotton very seriously; and that black Daniel and another black man have gone off—to India, I believe—with money and with other things that are of such importance that if I don't recover them—what with these and another mistake of mine—the firm will be crippled, if not ruined!'

'Oh, my poor George!' she cried. 'Take my money!—do! And make things right with it!'

'My dear Bell!' he exclaimed, rising, 'I couldn't apply a penny of your money to mend the trouble I've made by my own folly!'

'Sit down, George dear,' said she, 'and let us talk of this quietly.'

'There is no time for talk, my dear Bell!' said George. 'My father will tell you all about it.'

'But won't you take my money?' said she almost piteously. 'The money was designed by Uncle Harry for the benefit of the family, I am sure, if the family ever needed it. He was always talking to me of our family coming first. You will take the money—won't you? I can write a cheque at once!'

'Bell, my dear, you are generosity—you are goodness itself!—but I will not touch a penny of your money! I am going to succeed, or fail, by myself in this, Bell! I want to show my father that if I make a blunder, I can try my best to repair it! And I am going to find those black villains, even if I should have to go to the other side of the world! Do you know Ainsworth's address, Bell?'

'Mr. Ainsworth's address?' echoed Isabel, beset anew with an unaccountable alarm.

'I want to ask him about that letter he wrote to me: about the condition in which he

saw Daniel. I was an ungrateful fool. I believe if I had paid attention to what he wrote me, I should have been saved this trouble with Daniel! Do you know, Bell, why I tore his letter up? I was jealous of him, Bell!'

Isabel had heard him confess almost as much before, but not so explicitly. It struck her now as if she had heard it for the first time: such a strange feeling of guilt was hanging about her heart.

'No!' she said, scarce knowing what she said, and clasping her hands to restrain herself. 'Surely not!'

'I was. Now, give me his address, if you know it, and let me go!'

Isabel wrote the address with trembling fingers, and handed it to him, saying: 'It is the barest chance that you will find him in; though he is as likely to be at home now as at any time. And then you are going to pursue those men. I hope you will succeed in your

quest, George!—I do, indeed!' She could find nothing better—nothing more charged with feeling—than that to say: she could not belie herself.

George looked tenderly on her, and took her hand. 'Let me kiss you once, Bell, before I go.'

When he was gone, she sat down in a passion of repugnance of herself, and wrote a few lines to Ainsworth:

'My dear, my dear—George has been here. He's in great trouble. I could say nothing to him of what is in our minds. He asked me for your address. You have seen him, I hope. We had better not meet again till this is past. It is more than I can endure. I cannot humiliate myself in my own eyes. I love you—I love you, my dear; but I will not be base and snatch the pleasure of seeing you—when that pleasure makes me ashamed. Oh, my dear, my dear, let me do what I think

is right and honest, and help me to do it.—Ever your own.'

. . . . . .

Alan Ainsworth sat in his old lodgings in Woburn Place when he was surprised to hear 'Mr. Suffield' announced, and amazed to see George walk in.

'I have to apologise to you, Ainsworth,' said George at once, 'for intruding on you. But I am in trouble and in haste—and I want to ask you particularly about what you wrote to me last summer concerning that black rascal of mine, Daniel Trichinopoly.'

'Oh, you have at last found he is a rascal, then?' said Ainsworth.

'If I had listened to you, Ainsworth, that day you said you saw him in the new mill, or even later, when you wrote to me, I should have been spared the trouble. I behaved badly; I behaved like a cub; and I ask you to forgive me.'

'My dear fellow,' said Ainsworth, taking the proffered hand, 'I have nothing to forgive!—nothing!' He said that sincerely, but somewhat awkwardly; for he felt that on the whole George had much to forgive him. 'In what way, may I ask, has his rascality developed?'

George told him the story of his own folly and of Daniel's guile as briefly as he could.

'And now, I see,' said Ainsworth, 'you want to trace him?'

'To follow and catch him, please God!' said George fervently.

'Well, when I saw him,' said Ainsworth, 'he was just like one of those lascar fellows that are sailors or stokers on the Peninsular and Oriental steamers. Was he anything of a sailor, do you know?'

'I should say, not a bit,' answered George.

'And now I think of it,' said Ainsworth,

'it must have been stoking he was dreaming of in his opium sleep. I remember perfectly—it made a great impression on me—the horror with which he talked of the fire!—the fire and the water!'

'A lascar stoker on an Indian boat!' exclaimed George. 'That's very likely. He'd think himself completely hid in that way beyond thought of detection. But there's no time to be lost,' said he, rising.

Ainsworth insisted on accompanying him, and they went out together, Ainsworth longing to be frank and confess his love for Isabel, while he vainly felt how impossible it was to tell his companion such a thing then. They took a cab to Scotland Yard to find, or to hear of, the detective who had charge of Daniel's case. Scotland Yard had not yet discovered what had become of Daniel, and the two young men communicated their suspicion and its basis. The suspicion seemed to the

official mind worth taking into account; and a detective was detailed to accompany them to the dock office of the Peninsular and Oriental Company. There, after much difficulty, diving into the memory of the worried dock-agent—for he was eaten up with business, that day being the sailing day of the company—it was elicited that a lascar answering to Daniel's description, and bearing even Daniel's name, had sailed that very day at noon as a stoker in the *Travancore* in place of a defaulting lascar. Was the agent sure that was not a week ago? George asked. The agent was quite sure that none but return lascars sailed a week ago. A visit to the office of the company in Leadenhall Street added the strengthening fact that there had sailed as a second-class passenger for Bombay in the *Travancore* a Parsee, giving the name of Mookerjee.

So much success at setting out cheered

George beyond measure, and he was all agog to be off in pursuit—though how a successful pursuit was to be devised he did not know, since the first port of call for the *Travancore* was Gibraltar. He had reckoned that, if the fugitives had sailed—as they might have done—the week before, he might have caught them up by travelling overland by the mail-train to Brindisi.

'They have six hours' start of us!' exclaimed George, looking at his watch.

The detective who had accompanied them from Scotland Yard proposed that an authoritative telegram should be at once sent to the shipping agent at Gibraltar demanding the detention of one Daniel, a stoker on board of the *Travancore*; and that the other detective, who had taken charge of the case from the first, should journey with George, with warrants for the arrest of Daniel Trichinopoly and Mr. Tanderjee. Then George bade

'good-bye' to Ainsworth, and went on to Rutland Gate alone.

Arrived there, he found Lord Clitheroe waiting to accompany him on whatever quest he might be going, with a portmanteau ready packed.

'I happened to look in,' said he, 'and your father told me about this business—I'—he hastened to explain, in answer to a blush on George's face—'being almost one of the family. And so I made up my mind to go with you wherever you are going. It's not right for a man to go on a sport of that sort by himself.'

'It's awfully good of you,' said George gratefully, 'to think of coming.' And he related all he had discovered.

'The P. & O. boat calls at Gibraltar on Tuesday—does it not?' said Clitheroe. 'Rail at once to Marseilles, I would suggest—and then on by sea or by rail, as best we

can. I think I can be of use to you on the route.'

George had a word or two with his father alone—while Phemy took the opportunity of pressing Clitheroe's hand, and murmuring, 'Aren't you a dear!' and then—with a basket of provision, which Mrs. Suffield insisted they should take, because there was no time for dinner, and her son had scarcely tasted food since morning—he and Lord Clitheroe drove away through darkness and fog to Charing Cross, to take the 8.15 mail-train, calling first at Scotland Yard for the detective who was to accompany them.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### SUFFIELD GOES INTO THE 'CORNER'

Isabel's opportunity had come: the crisis had arrived—which she had so vividly anticipated some weeks before—when her 'family,' who had rescued and nurtured her youth, needed the surrender of her wealth, if not of herself. Without hesitation she sat down and wrote a cheque for fifty thousand pounds, payable 'to George Suffield, Esq.' ('my dear uncle,' she had a mind to add, so that all the world might guess from this document how good he was). She knew enough of her own business to be aware that there was not nearly so much money as that lying to her credit at the bank; but she also

knew that certain securities could be quickly realised on the morrow. She did not wish to encounter George again; so she waited until after dinner, and then she set out with her cheque for Rutland Gate. She followed the footman into the library, where, he said, Mr. Suffield sat alone. She knocked, and a smothered voice said, 'Come in.' She entered. Her uncle was sitting up in his easy-chair with a red bandana over his head, and an open book near him on the table.

'Trying to have an after-dinner nap?' said Isabel. 'I am so sorry to have interrupted you, uncle! But I wanted to see you alone.'

'No apologies, my dear,' said he—'no apologies. I was just looking at that *Don Quixote* there—wonderful book that!—and those pictures of Doré's—wonderful imagination Doré had, and all that sort of thing; and I was reading where that rascal, Sancho

Panza, says, "Blessed be the man that invented sleep!" (nobody invented it, of course, you know)—"it wraps you about like a cloak!" And thinks I to myself, "By Jingo, now, if I don't try it!"'

'You dear old uncle!' said she. 'And I interrupted your experiment!'

'It's of no consequence, my dear,' said he, with a laugh at his own joke; 'for I believe I've tried th' experiment before. Sit down, and tell me th' news. I can't give you long, because I must be off presently to catch th' night-train down to Lancashire.'

'I believe, uncle,' said she, 'I've come on the same business as you must be going on.'

'Sayst tha, lass?' said he, and a shade of unusual seriousness settled on his face.

'George has told me all about it,' said Isabel, now somewhat shy about broaching her business; 'and I want you to do me a great favour, uncle.'

'What I can do, I will, my lass,' answered her uncle, eyeing her.

'I want you to let me help you with the money Uncle Harry left me. I have brought a cheque with me; there is not so much as that at present in the bank, but I shall make it all right to-morrow. Take it, please, uncle.'

He took the cheque from her hand, and looked at it and looked at her.

'It's not the whole,' said she, with a blush. 'But some of the securities will take a little time to realise—won't they?'

'It's the biggest cheque I ever saw?' exclaimed her uncle, looking at it again.

'And you will take it and use it, uncle, as a—as a present from me?'

She was doubtful of his look: it did not seem to her that of an acceptor of a present.

'I'll take it, my lass'——

'Oh, thank you, uncle!' she exclaimed.

'I'll take it, my lass, but I'll not use it. But I'll frame it with a gold frame, and I'll hang it up and keep it as the biggest and the kindest cheque *I* ever saw!'

'Don't, uncle,' she said, with a deep blush of confusion and disappointment—'don't treat me as a child—as if I don't understand what I am doing!'

'Thou'rt nobbut a child to me, Bell, my dear,' said her uncle, rising with tears in his eyes, and patting her cheek, as he had been wont when she was a little girl. 'Thou'lt always be to me the bit of a lonely lass that gave me her hand in this London twenty years ago, and came away wi' me to Lancashire, and that has been a daughter to me ever since. I understand, my lass, why thou'st done this! I thank tha, my dear!' He took her hand and pressed it. 'But it conna be! Can a father take his lass's bit of brass because she's generous enough to hand

it over to him, and because he has been an owd fool?'

At that Isabel was touched enough to shed tears, and foolish enough to have not a word to say.

The footman entered and addressed Mr. Suffield. 'The keb's at the door, sir,' said he, and withdrew.

'Well, Bell, my dear,' said Suffield, 'I must go. But first—in case of mishap.'—He sat down and took pen and ink and wrote across the face of Isabel's cheque, 'Cancelled by Geo. Suffield,' folded it and put it in his pocket-book. 'Now, lass,' said he, rising again, 'kiss thy uncle, and say "Good-bye."'

Isabel kissed her uncle affectionately, saying: 'But I haven't done with you yet. It remains to be seen whether you are to have your way, uncle, or I mine.'

Her aunt entered to see that Suffield was properly wrapped up for his journey, and to

beg that she might hear every day how matters went. Isabel and she stood on the steps to see the excellent man enter the cab and drive away through the winter night, to remedy or control the evils wrought by the self-confidence and rash ambition of his son.

Suffield went down to Lancashire strong in the main resolves to clear the name of his house from the offence and iniquity of 'cornering,' and to purge his business of such irregularities as had crept into it during his son's reign. It was not yet quite evident to himself into what details of action these resolves would lead him; for though, in the first flush of his indignation, he had been ready to make an immediate sweep of the 'corner'—so far as George was concerned in it—he now saw, being calm and having considered, that while ruin might be brought on himself by haste, no harm need be wrought on others by delay and temporising. He

would like to 'unload' himself of the Gorgonian responsibilities—for his son's responsibilities were his—without gain to himself and without loss to others; he feared it was impossible to 'unload' at all without some loss to himself; but he hoped that by management the loss might be kept small.

When he showed himself at the works in the early morning all were delighted to see him, but all wondered what had 'come to Mester George,' that 'th' owd mester' was there alone. Late in the day the effect was similar in the City—in his own office, in the streets, and on 'Change.

'Hallo, George!' was the greeting of old acquaintances. 'What's brought tha here again?'

'Business, my lad, business,' was his answer. 'Matters o' business to be seen to. But tha knows th' saying: "A wise head keeps a close tongue."'

Next morning he received a telegram from George, from Marseilles: 'Both train and steamer no go. Going on by steam-yacht. See Gorgonio.'

'Hired the yacht, I expect,' said Suffield to himself. 'That's more expense to little purpose! And now, I suppose, in any case I'd better see that Gorgonio creature about this cornering.'

But the day was Saturday, when business closed early. Suffield, therefore, resolved to leave Gorgonio alone till Monday morning. He sat down and wrote to him that he wished to see him on very important business, if he would be so good as to be at liberty to listen to him at an early hour on Monday. But his wish was gratified sooner than he anticipated. He was just thinking of locking his writing-table and going home to Holdsworth, when Mr. Gorgonio was announced.

'Show him in,' said Suffield, and twisted round in his chair to receive him on the defensive.

Gorgonio entered with smiles and bows, and a general profuseness of affability and politeness. He had, he said, expected to meet Mr. Suffiel' the younger; he presumed he was addressing the father of Mr. Suffiel' the younger?

'Yea,' said Suffield; 'I'm responsible for him both as his father and as head of the firm.' And he gave Gorgonio a pointed look to emphasise his statement.

'I am please, Mr. Suffiel',' said Gorgonio politely, 'to make your agreeable acquaintance.'

'I'm sorry to say, sir,' replied Suffield, 'that I can't return the compliment.'

Gorgonio looked a little put out by that reply; and perceiving that Mr. Suffield was not only not prepossessed in his favour but

absolutely prejudiced against him, his amiability sank into a more insinuative and watchful quality.

'I come over,' said he, 'to fill an engagement to lunch with your son, but I suppose he have forgot.'

'I suppose he did,' said Suffield; 'and you see he's not here to-day. Still, if you like to lunch with me——'

'Thank you, Mr. Suffiel'; but I cannot impose upon your politeness.'

'Just as you please, sir. But what,' continued Suffield, 'is this precious cotton business you and my son are concerned in?'

'You must excuse me, Mr. Suffiel',' said Gorgonio, 'but I cannot speak of your son's private business.'

'Private business be hanged, sir!' said Suffield. 'It's not so peculiar and private to my son but that, so far as I understand yet,

my money's pledged in it! What is the game?'

'You must excuse me, Mr. Suffiel',' persisted Gorgonio, 'but at least I cannot tell you without your son's authority.'

'Very well. If you refuse to enlighten me fully about this business, I must refuse to be accountable at all for my son's engagements.'

'We had better wait, Mr. Suffiel',' said Gorgonio, 'till your son can be present.'

'My son, sir, cannot be present for two or three weeks——'

'Two or three weeks?—*weeks?*'

'He has gone away on a voyage—for the good of his own health, and mine, sir, and I cannot say when you will have an opportunity of seeing him.'

'It is very bad weather for voyage,' remarked Gorgonio, now grey-skinned and sharp-eyed with alarm and suspicion.

'My son's an Englishman, sir,' said Suf-

field; 'and he prefers a voyage in bad weather, sir, with the sea as rough as the wind can make it. But that's neither here nor there. Are you going to explain to me the position of things, or are you not?'

'I am to speak to you, Mr. Suffiel',' said Gorgonio, 'as if you were your son—is that so?'

'That is so. Now, fire away.'

'Well, Mr. Suffiel', the second part of that consignment from Bombay what you did give Mr. Tanderjee a three-fourth's advance for, is come into dock; I have seen it this morning, and it is not—any more than the other—worth twopence a pound!'

'I'll see that cotton on Monday morning myself,' said Suffield, taking out his tablets and making a note. 'Go on.'

Gorgonio stared in some surprise; obviously this was not the same man as Mr. Suffiel' the younger.

'I have bought for us,' continued Gorgonio, 'in the last two days ten thousand more bales for January delivery.'

'At what price?'

'At six and five-eighths.'

'And what is the "spot" price?'[1]

'Spot, Mr. Suffiel', is six and eleven-sixteenths; so, you see, we do very well.'

'Now,' said Suffield, 'we come to the business I wanted to talk to you about; I had written to you to make an engagement for that purpose. You'll oblige me, sir, by buying no more; about the getting rid of what we have I can't speak till I know the whole situation.'

'Getting rid, Mr. Suffiel'! Unloading, Mr. Suffiel'! Oh, my great heaven!—do you know what you're saying, Mr. Suffiel'? The business is going just beautiful! Prices is

[1] 'Spot' price means the price for delivery at once, or on the 'spot.'

steady! Nobody is afraid! Nobody believe nothing is going to happen! We hold two hundred thousand bales at this moment against a stock of a little over seventy thousand!—and nobody guess it! Get rid, Mr. Suffiel'? Bust up the loveliest corner as ever was?—and lose your chance of more than one hundred thousand pounds profit? Oh, surely no, Mr. Suffiel'! you are joking!'

'I've never knowingly made money dishonestly,' said Suffield with unusual sternness, 'and I and mine are not going to begin now. If I made the profit you name out of this cornering business, I'd do it only by ruining or crippling scores o' men. I won't do it! And if I could, I'd shake the whole business off my hands this minute! But my son engaged to back you with money in this, and I'm responsible for my son. He gave you his word——'

'He give me his bond!' exclaimed Gorgonio. 'I have it on paper! It is in black and white!'

'His word would ha' been binding enough,' said Suffield quietly. 'He gave you his word, and I must be bound by it. But since I—that is, my son—engaged to find the necessary money, I must have a voice in the business—and a final voice. And I say I want to have done wi' it as soon as possible: you'll do no cornering wi' *my* help. Clear it out—and the sooner the better. Only, at the same time, as I don't want to see anybody else lose, I don't want to lose myself if I can help it.'

'You are bound to lose, Mr. Suffiel'!' said Gorgonio desperately. 'Bound! When the "bears" find you selling—and you can't sell two hundred thousand bales in a hurry without being found out—down they'll send the prices!'

'Well,' said Suffield with a grim tightening of his mouth, 'all I can say is, let us lose as little as possible. You seem to have known how to buy without raising suspicions; you should be able to sell.'

'And what, Mr. Suffiel', is to become of my profit?'

'You'll have your broker's commission from me; won't that do?' said Suffield.

'That is very little for all the time, all the brain, all the skill and knowledge I have spent on this business! Ah, this beautiful corner!—to be spoil!'

'I'll do this much more,' said Suffield: 'if you can get off these bales at contract prices—at the prices you took them up at—you shall have double commission; and that, sir, is, in my opinion, more than twice as much as you deserve. A man that plans and makes a corner should be sent to hard

labour and fed on skilly, just as much as a man that steals his neighbour's purse. Good-morning, sir. I'll call on you on Monday, when, maybe, you'll see your way a bit better.'

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### IN THE 'CORNER'

The interval till Monday Suffield spent in peace. He did not think it was worth his while to waste his strength in travelling to London and back in that brief time, even to have the pleasure of seeing and taking counsel with his wife. On Sunday he went to church, and then in and out among his own people, cheering the young, and gossiping with and comforting the aged: he understood his own folk and their rudely affectionate ways better than he did those of the south country.

On Monday his anxiety and trouble began, which were to last till the month ended. He was the simple-minded, honest kind of man—

as I have elsewhere remarked—who, when once he suspects, entertains an uncompromising distrust. He disliked and suspected Gorgonio, and therefore he believed it was impossible for Gorgonio, of his own motion, to deal honestly in any business. When he found, on visiting the Indian cotton in dock, that Gorgonio had spoken truth when he had said it was worth no more than twopence a pound, he merely thought it was one of those cases which frequently occur, when the habitual liar has not told a lie only because it was not worth his while, and he distrusted Gorgonio the more for his having told the truth on one occasion. When Gorgonio asked what should be done with the cotton—should it be warehoused and sold by parcels? —Suffield suspected him of some ulterior purpose—he would have found it difficult to say what—in making the suggestion.

'No,' said he. 'Sell the rubbish off at

once. It's worth no more than twopence; and if we can get twopence for it, let us be thankful.'

But they did not get twopence for it. Twopence was very cheerfully given at first; but when still more was offered and more pressed upon the market 'without reserve,' buyers—a suspicious folk—began to think the cotton must really be worse than the samples indicated; so they refused to give twopence; and before the lot was cleared out a penny was reached. And Gorgonio laughed to himself—for he had secretly bought in a considerable quantity of it at a penny—and exclaimed: 'This is beautiful way to do business! The Suffiel' *père* is old fool!'

But Suffield was no fool: he was only consumed by dislike of the whole business, and distrust of Gorgonio. It worried and wore him beyond measure that the 'unloading' of 'corner' responsibilities must be en-

trusted to Gorgonio. It chafed him so much when he sat in his office that he had to get up and take the train to Liverpool 'to see how the Asiatic scamp was getting on.' He would even hang about among the busy crowd on the Liverpool flags—a very notable and half-forlorn-seeming figure—with a kind of watchful eye on Gorgonio; and in the troubled watches of the night he dreamed horribly of Gorgonio—who more and more looked as if he had been buried in some noisome place and, after some time, had been dug up again—of his hideous, pendulous, pitted nose, and his active pig's eyes.

And Gorgonio felt he was disliked and distrusted, and saw he was under such surveillance as the simple Suffield could bring to bear. Under no circumstances was Gorgonio a sweet-tempered and forgiving creature; but under these he became vindictive and reckless—reckless of his backer's interests, and

reckless even in a measure of his own. By the following Monday, when prices were 'struck' for the week, not more than twenty thousand of the two hundred thousand bales of contracts had been got rid of; and prices had gone down, so that difference would have to be paid on one hundred and eighty thousand bales! On Tuesday afternoon, Gorgonio came to Suffield and set before him, with an ill-disguised satisfaction, the reckoning which would have to be met on Thursday, the 'settling day.' Mr. Suffiel' must make out a cheque—to be paid into the cotton bank—for a considerable number of thousands!

'This must come to an end,' said Suffield, when he had made out the cheque. 'This repeated much would ruin any man!'

'How can any man make it end, Mr. Suffiel'?' said Gorgonio. 'The more you sell out, the more will the prices go down!—down! It cannot help itself!'

So the days passed, and George did not return; and with waiting and worry his father began to look worn and aged: his hair turned greyer, and his cheek lost its wholesome ruddiness. It added immensely to his trouble that, under George's rule, the interests of the Suffield business had been sacrificed to the demands of this extraneous speculation, and that proper business payments had been half-met or postponed, to permit of money being diverted to cotton transactions.

It was impossible that the change passing upon Suffield and the load of anxiety he bore —he was of those to whom concealment was well-nigh impossible—should not be observed in so well known and remarkable a figure as his. Speculation as to reasons became common. Where was his son?—shipped off because he had run the rig pretty freely? And why did he so frequently journey to Liver-

pool, and appear—as was said—on 'the flags'? Men discussed these points as they saw him on 'Change, as they sat at lunch over against him, and when he passed them in the streets. Whispers went round, and doubts began to gather: Was the house of Suffield becoming shaky? Was he there to stave off reverses brought upon the house by the ignorance and carelessness of his son? A foolish thing that was he had done, in putting his son in complete charge of the business, and going off himself to London, to swell about—oh yes! everybody knew his wife was an ambitious woman!—among London nobs in Parliament and Society! Suffield was a 'very good sort'; but he would come to grief yet, through his good-nature and his wife's ambition. Suffield saw these things in the looks and heard them in the tones of men, and understood only too well how they might help to bring a more untoward end about.

And yet he could do nothing but wait and endure till the end came, putting his shaky trust in 'that rascal Gorgonio.'

A diversion came at the end of the week. Telegrams were published in all the newspapers—in the Liverpool papers in large type—proclaiming that there had been a great fire on the quays of Savannah, in which some warehouses filled with cotton ready for shipment had been completely destroyed. The extent of the loss was not known, but the immediate result in Liverpool was the raising of the prices of cotton. Thereupon he wrote at once to Gorgonio: 'Seize this favourable opportunity to sell out as much as ever you can'; and then he was ashamed that he should be pleased to take advantage of a disaster which perhaps meant ruin to some.

Early next week—which was the third of the crisis—he was surprised and troubled by

an anonymous letter from Liverpool. It was signed 'One who knows,' and it advised Mr. Suffield to put no trust in Gorgonio, who was playing him false: he was working 'both on the bull and on the bear tack;' it was to his interest to sell little at present, and then to send down prices with a rush at the end of the month, in the endeavour to clear out. That troubled Suffield very much; for must it not have been written by some one in Gorgonio's confidence or in Gorgonio's office? Who else should know that Suffield had such dealings with Gorgonio? Suffield went to Liverpool to see Gorgonio, and found that part at least of the anonymous communication was true; for Gorgonio had sold comparatively little, in spite of Suffield's urgent instruction after the news of the fire in Savannah. Then Suffield was very wroth.

'You are not keeping faith with me, Mr. Gorgonio,' said he. 'I agreed to carry out

my son's compact about money, and you on that understanding agreed on your part to work off these responsibilities as quickly as possible!'

'And, Mr. Suffiel', I do work them off as quickly as possible.'

'What, you villain!' exclaimed Suffield. 'And this last time, with everything in your favour, you have sold something less than ten thousand, notwithstanding my express instructions to get rid of as many as possible!'

'What would you have, Mr. Suffiel'?' cried Gorgonio, with a snarling reasonableness. 'First you say, "Do not sell at low price!" Then you say, "Sell so many as possible!" But if I sell many as possible, I must sell at low price, because price go down under great many. Well, what? Which? I cannot please you both way! I am not two person—twice—double! I am not what

you call ambidextrous! I am not amphibious! I am not hermaphroditus! No!—try to sell both way yourself, Mr. Suffiel'! I am willing!'

What, then, could Suffield say or do? What could he do but fume within himself, and fret, because he was certain this man was playing him false, though he could not refute his plausible arguments? And the worst of it was—the most galling and intolerable thing!—that he must still continue tied to this man till the end of the business.

It was at that time it first became evident to Suffield that the business world in which he lived and moved was aware of his cotton entanglements. As matter of fact, the shrewd Lancashire men, whose care it was to be 'up to' all the moves of the complex commercial game, had for some time truly guessed what was the nature of the unworthy connection of the Suffield house with a man

like Gorgonio. The disappearance, moreover, of Tanderjee—who, it was known, had had business relations with the younger Suffield—and of Daniel Trichinopoly—who had been his creature—and then of George himself, could not, and did not, fail to be remarked and interpreted. In one way and another a tolerably accurate knowledge of the situation was common property; insomuch that, while the older and more staid men refused to believe that a man of Suffield's commercial probity and honour would encourage so speculative and disreputable a thing as a corner, many of the younger and more light-minded—who knew not Suffield—believed he was still trying to hold the corner for his absent son, and betted on 'the old man's' power to hold out.

Under these disquieting circumstances, it is not surprising that creditors of the house of Suffield—men who commonly would have

never thought of pressing for payment—urged their accounts upon the attention of Mr. Suffield, who bravely met their demands and wrote them cheques, till his account at the bank began to run to fewer figures than it had been wont. And still he sought assistance or advice of no one, but sat alone in his sturdy and cheery stoicism. One morning—and this was the first event that absolutely convinced him his world was in possession of his secret—'Mr. Poynting' was announced. Mr. Poynting was the head of a firm of engineers who had for many years made all the Suffield machinery, and to whom a large bill had fallen due. Had Mr. Poynting called about that bill?—The heart of Mr. Suffield sank.

'Don't be frightened of me, Suffield,' said Mr. Poynting. 'I'm not intruding on you as a creditor; I'm come to see you as an old friend. To come to the point at once—you'll

forgive me if I'm wrong—you are, or may be soon, pressed for money. Will ten thousand pounds for a year, or a couple of years, be of any use to you? If it will be of any use, you can have it, and welcome, my friend.'

Suffield was so moved by that generous and spontaneous offer of aid that he could not speak for a moment.

'Thou'rt good, Poynting!' said he, 'very good! I thank tha heartily, but I mun fend for mysen! Had it been a disaster o' Providence that brought me to this I mowt ha' said different, but I ha' brought it on mysen, and I mun warstle through it by mysen; thank yo' all th' same, Poynting.'

'I ha' understood,' said Mr. Poynting, 'that it was your son backed up this attempt at a corner, unbeknown to you.'

'Oh, they say that, do they?—My poor lad! There's not many to say a good word for him now, I daresay; though I reckon

they were all "Hail-fellow" wi' him when he was about.—Yea; th' foolish lad thought he was going to do a great stroke. "He that maketh haste to be rich,"' he continued, exercising his agreeable faculty for incorrect quotation, '"falleth into speculation and a snare!" Th' owd way's best! I don't hold wi' these new-fangled dodges for making money. There's no real work or wealth in them. But th' lad's away trying hard to clear off a bit of his mistake, and I'm bound to see him out of it—though it's a more serious job than I thought it would be.'

'I don't hold wi' speculation myself,' said Mr. Poynting, 'and corners in anything are, I think, damnable. But isn't it a pity, Suffield, to let all this cotton go, as they tell me it's going, at poor rates? Take the ten thousand, if it's any help to you, and hold on to the last day for a rise; and then you'll be

out of it with a pound or two in your pocket.'

'Thank yo' again, Poynting; but the cotton mun go. And I'd far rather I lost than other folk. I'll not ha' it said about me that I made a penny out of so damnable and detestable a thing as a corner! My only concern now is to save th' business; and I think I can save it—though I may ha' to go and live in a cottage again.'

'Well, Suffield,' said Poynting with resignation, 'you know th' saying: "There's nought so queer as folk." A wilful man mun ha' his way. But if you should think better o't, let me know.'

'Thank yo' again, friend,' said Suffield. 'I'll not forget; I'll remember it a' my days!' And he wrung his friend's hand as he went away.

A little later he was surprised by a visit from a bank official. The official desired to

communicate a very delicate and peculiar matter of business. 'You may know or remember,' said he, 'that we were asked by Mr. Suffield, junior, to trace fourteen Bank of England notes for five hundred pounds?'

'I remember,' said Suffield. 'You telegraphed to my son in London about twelve of them.'

'We have now,' said the official, 'traced another—traced it to a person in Liverpool named Gorgonio, with whom, I believe, you have dealings, Mr. Suffield, and who certainly had dealings with Mr. Suffield, junior, and the original holder of the note.'

'You mean Tanderjee?—I was convinced that Gorgonio was a scoundrel!'

'Precisely. Of course, that person may have received it from Tanderjee in the ordinary way of business, or he may not. It would be difficult, we think, Mr. Suffield, to

show that he did not; but we thought you would like to know the fact.'

Yes; Mr. Suffield saw it would be difficult to show there was anything improper in Gorgonio's possession of a five hundred pound note which had passed from the hand of Tanderjee.

'I hope, Mr. Suffield,' said the official, 'that this cotton business of Mr. Suffield, junior, goes well now?'

'Thank you,' said Suffield; 'but it won't go well till it's gone altogether!'

## CHAPTER XL

### OUT OF THE 'CORNER'

While Suffield pondered during the next day or two how it could be brought home to Gorgonio that the five hundred pound note which he had received from Tanderjee was his share of the Tanderjee cotton fraud—which Suffield did not for a moment doubt—a letter was on its way to him from Marseilles from his son concerning this very matter. George was returning home with both criminals; but they were all so worn with fatigue that they could not set out so soon or travel with such speed as the letter, which was mainly written to advise the arrest of Gorgonio (if possible): Tanderjee had de-

nounced him as a participator not only in the cotton fraud, but also in the theft of the plans!

That letter reached Suffield at a critical moment, and with it in his pocket he went to Liverpool to call on Gorgonio. It was only three days to January 31, when all the cotton transactions in which Gorgonio and George were involved must close, and when the final reckoning must be made up according to the prices with which the month would end. He was therefore determined to make a final effort, by means of a threat, to encourage Gorgonio to get rid of most of the cotton promises at a tolerable price before the final, fatal day. When Suffield entered Gorgonio's office, the latter merely sat back in his chair and waited: their relations were too strained for the exchange of civilities.

'More than a month ago, Mr. Gorgonio,' said Suffield, taking a seat, 'you received from

Mr. Tanderjee one of several notes for five hundred pounds, the which he had received from the bank in payment of a cheque which my son gave him: would you mind telling me why Tanderjee gave you that note?'

Gorgonio looked at his claws a moment and then at Suffield. 'Yes,' said he, 'I remember. Tanderjee gave it to me in way of business—yes; in payment of matter of business between myself and Tanderjee.'

'Will you swear, if required, that the matter of business for which Tanderjee paid was not the help you had given in his cotton fraud, and in another matter concerning my affairs which I will not name at present?'

'Who say that, Mr. Suffiel'?' exclaimed Gorgonio, turning a very evil colour. 'Who, Mr. Suffiel', have the impudence to say such thing?'

'Tanderjee has,' answered Suffield calmly.

'Tanderjee?' Gorgonio looked about him

in perplexity. 'When can Tanderjee have say that? Tanderjee is gone!'

'But he will come again!' said Suffield. 'He is on the way back now—under the charge of my son and a detective.'

'Ah!—that, then, is the reason,' exclaimed Gorgonio in a burst of enlightenment, 'why Mr. Suffiel', younger, go away on voyage! That is so!'

'Well, then, Mr. Gorgonio, is Tanderjee a liar?—or, has he told the truth?'

'Tanderjee is liar certainly! I will tell him he is liar, to the face—when he come!'

'Will you be prepared, when Tanderjee and the other man stand their trial, to clear your character, and give the details of the business for which Tanderjee paid you five hundred pounds?'

'I will, Mr. Suffiel'!—'Pon my sacred word of honour, I will!'

'Mr. Gorgonio,' Suffield broke forth at

length, 'I believe you to be a creature without honour or honesty!—to be a liar and a thief! It would do me good to be able to kick you into the street, and down the street, and into the Mersey—and so out of England, which creatures like you pollute wi' your presence! But I can't afford to do that! It is my deplorable lot at present to be tied to you—sink or swim! You would be glad if I sank, I know; but—please Providence!—I don't mean to sink if I can make use of a reptile like you!—you've done badly for me in this cotton business, for your own ends, as I believe, though—God help me!—I can't prove it! But now I give you one chance to do better. There are three days left. If by the end of that time you haven't unloaded, at a fair price, at least three-fourths of these responsibilities that still remain—I can't in reason ask you to do more than that in the time, but you know how to manage it——'

'I cannot!—no man can!—do that. I have say again and again, Mr. Suffiel', that you cannot unload much and not send down the price! And it is not possible to unload so much as you say in three days at any price!'

'Then,' said Suffield, 'I shall have you arrested to stand your trial with the two others! If you accomplish what I ask, I shall say no more about this!—That is my last word!'

Suffield rose to go; and there was about Gorgonio, as he leaned over the table, and, with a snarl on his lip, glared at the big Englishman over his hunched shoulder, something of the ugly, obscene suggestion of the hyena at bay in his cage—some hint of the brute's evil temper, evil colour, and bristling back.

'I will try to accomplish what you say. It is difficulty; but I will do it!'

'Very well,' said Suffield, and went.

It was a desperate task that Gorgonio had promised, under compulsion, to perform—so desperate, that he would seem to have soon determined to abandon it. For the past fortnight he had really sold much less than he had reported to Suffield that he had sold, holding on with the gambler's hope of emerging on the last day of the month in possession of a considerable 'corner,' and so of forcing up prices and reaping his profit in spite of Suffield, even if he also made—as he would make—a profit for Suffield too. But when the sturdy Suffield presented his ultimatum, he had a horrible vision of final ruin, of trial in a terrible English court, where a man cannot bribe, of imprisonment in an English jail, whence it is difficult for a man to escape: then panic seized him—as in an unforeseen emergency it often does seize the craftiest, coolest man and the most savage and

courageous brute—his nerve went, and he could think of nothing but flight.

In the afternoon of the day before the last, Suffield received a telegram signed 'Gcrgonio,' and demanding an immediate interview. Suffield went; but when he arrived at Gorgonio's office he found no Gorgonio. He was received by the confidential clerk of Gorgonio, who said that his master had not been in town all day, nor had sent any explanatory word; that he (the clerk) had first telegraphed to his home in the suburbs, and had then gone to it: the house was shut up, and no news of Gorgonio was to be had! The only possible conclusion was that Gorgonio had fled!

'And,' said Suffield, 'if I have driven him out of Lancashire, and perhaps out of England, I shall reckon I ha' deserved well o' my country! But he must ha' gone because this business is in a bad way. You're an Englishman, I hope, my lad?'

'I'm a Welshman, Mr. Suffield,' said the young man with a smile.

'That's the same thing, my lad. I can trust tha. Tha knows all Gorgonio's business, I suppose? Well, then, show me all this business, and help me to decide what's to be done, and thou shannot lose by it.'

So they sat down together and went through the records of all the transactions; and it became evident to Suffield that comparatively little had been sold—that more than one hundred thousand bales of contracts still remained.

'Why, Mr. Suffield,' said the young man, 'you command the market yet! If you don't sell to-morrow—if you decide to hold the corner—prices will go up, and you will make a big haul!'

For one hesitating moment a vision danced before Suffield of a profit, instead of a loss—his apparently prosperous position maintained

and established instead of shrunk into something like poverty; his daughter's distinguished marriage coming to fruition instead of being perhaps blighted; and his wife's innocent ambitions fulfilled instead of thrust into the limbo of first-loves, broken promises, and wasted efforts. The dream lasted but a moment; the next he had recovered himself.

'No,' said he, 'I'll sell out! I'd rather lose half my capital than ha' it said of me I ever made a penny by cornering! Sell out, my lad; sell carefully and craftily, so as not to scare the prices—but sell!'

He decided, after a little hesitation, that there would be no advantage in his remaining in Liverpool for the last day, especially since he desired that he should not be openly identified with this business; and he left the confidential young man with the assurance

that he trusted him, and the encouragement to do his best.

The record of the last day is common property: was it not written and published in all the newspapers of the palatinate, under the heading 'Final Collapse of the Corner?' Thus the leading Liverpool daily wrote of it: 'On the last day the opening quotation of the market was 6·15, and for the first hour it ran down and up with remarkable uncertainty till 6·10 was reached. It then became evident that many "bulls" had been riding on the back of the leading operator, in the hope that he would help the market at the close. It was remarked as strange that the leading operator, Gorgonio, had not been seen; but it was rumoured that he had been quietly selling through another. The rumour spread, and then others scrambled to get out; and the prices fell down, down till 5·16 was reached as twelve o'clock struck.'

All the while Suffield was in telegraphic communication with Liverpool. Messages came regularly, marking, as it were, the quarters of each hour, and chronicling in the most unfeeling way the fluctuation, and then the steady declension, of the prices; and at the same time a clerk was kept passing to and fro between the office and the Exchange to check the telegrams by the prices registered there. Thus the quarters passed rapidly away until half-past eleven. At that hour Suffield left the office and went on 'Change to 'see the last of it,' as he said to himself. He walked up the noble crowded hall, and as he passed to his usual station the hubbub was hushed, and all eyes were turned on him, to observe how he was taking it. The anxiety of the past month had wrought a greater change on him than he was aware: the careless boyish ruddiness of his cheek was gone, and his hair had become white. He was there to

show that the worst would not break him, that he still meant to hold his head up among his fellows, and that if there was any man on 'Change had aught against him, he was ready to listen to his demand; and there was more than one creditor there who had meant to descend upon him, but who, seeing him, held his hand: they were proud now to have so much personal interest in him as to have him in their debt.

About ten minutes to noon his clerk brought him a telegram reporting that the price was 5·16, and that there still remained so many bales.

'Thank God!' said he. 'It might be worse!'

He lingered a few minutes longer, chatting to old acquaintances about other things than cotton; and then, when the hour struck which closed the business of the last day of the month on the Liverpool Cotton Exchange,

he left his place and walked out. He had sacrificed the corner, but he had saved his business; and they all guessed it. The throng, as if involuntarily, made an avenue for him and took off their hats as he passed—an action to which he responded by taking off his own—and as he went out at the wide portal a ringing cheer broke forth: 'Bravo, George!'

Suffield's heart was stirred within him, and reinvigorated. 'I'm turned fifty,' he said to himself, 'but I'll make my business again!—And now I'll sleep to-night!'

## CHAPTER XLI

### IN THE BOSOM OF THE FAMILY

Early that morning Mr. Suffield had received a brief telegram from his wife: 'George back. Broken down.' Suffield at once arranged to go to London; and he arrived there in the evening, travelling third class—for he accepted his poorer position at once without demur. 'And really,' he said to himself, 'I believe I prefer third—unless I should want to sleep.' When he entered the house at Rutland Gate he went first to the library; and as he glanced round upon the serried portraits of the Lords of Padiham, it was with an absolute sense of relief that

he thought he would soon see them no more: he would no longer be afflicted with the sense of their superciliousness. He would go back to his own people, with his own people, and live and die among his own people, performing the duties he had foolishly laid down to take up others for which he had little taste and indifferent aptitude. He was thinking thus hopefully, when his wife entered behind him.

'I have been looking for you, my dear,' said she, approaching to greet him with a kiss. 'Oh, my poor, dear George!' she cried. 'My owd lad! What has come to you? You've no colour in your poor cheek, and your hair's as white as it should be at eighty! Oh, my husband! My dear! And has it worked all this change upon you, my poor lad! My poor George! Oh, my dear! And you never told me!'

She kissed him, and wept over him, as a

girl might over her soldier-lover, from whom she has long been parted, and who returns wounded and worn. And he stroked her dark hair in silence, and kept as firm a mouth as he could.

'You got my letters, of course?' said Suffield, who had written—with some reserve—to his wife daily during his absence in Lancashire.

'I did. But what about yesterday, George, my dear? What's the end of it all?' she asked.

'It's all over, my lass,' he answered.

'You mean,' she exclaimed, clasping her hands tightly before her, 'that we are completely ruined?'

'Not altogether that, Joan, my dear,' said he. 'But we must leave this house, and sell or let th' Hall and Park, and we must let Parliament alone, and go back to work.'

'You have not made much of Parliament, have you, my dear owd lad?—so that need not distress us,' she observed with a smile.

'No, lass,' said he; 'I have not. I haven't spoken, I admit. But I've given a good many votes, and I've set a good example. There's too much talk there already, and too little work.'

'And it's all,' said she, taking little note of what he had said, but sitting down, glancing this way and that, as if to review the whole situation, 'through the recklessness of that boy!'

'Nay, lass; it's our own fault,' said Suffield. 'Don't be too hard on th' lad. He's our own son, Joan; carried away wi' his own plans for getting on. He meant no harm—I ha' thought it all out—the thing is, he shouldna ha' had th' whole machine trusted to him at his age.'

'And is it really so bad, George, as that we must go back to Lancashire and live in a small house?'

'It is, my lass,' said he, turning away and sitting down, saddened by the distress written on her face. 'There's about a hundred thousand gone, more or less!'

She followed him to his seat. The full light of the lamp now fell on him, and she again noted the worn and aged look he wore. The change in him smote her anew to the heart, and set free again her native founts of tenderness and generosity.

'Oh, my poor owd lad!' she cried, throwing her arms about his neck 'How terrible it must have been for you to bear! I had hardly thought of that! I believe I've grown a selfish woman, my poor dear! My George! My husband!' She laid her head upon his breast and wept.

'There, my dear lass!' said he, soothing

her. 'There! My dear wife! My owd sweetheart! My bonny bride!'

'Don't say these things to me now, George,' she murmured. 'I must think about all this, and see where we are. Have patience with me, won't you?'

'Patience, Joan, my dear!' said he. 'Of course I'll have patience. And if this business makes us pull well together again, I shall thank God for it from th' bottom of my heart.—Do you know what we shall do, my lass? We'll go away back, out of the hurry and scurry of this London; when all is said and done, it's not very filling or satisfying! —away back to our ain countree! You remember, Joan, how we used to sing,

> "O the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birken tree,
> They all are growing green in my ain countree!"

We'll go back, my dear, to our ain folk, and we'll be as happy as ever we were—happier than we ha' been this twelvemonth!

I ha' got my eye on that nice little house —for a year or two, at least—wi' th' creeper and the jasmine on the walls, and the evening primroses in the side garden! And thou shalt be my own brave manager again!—mother o' th' house, and queen o' th' whole place!'

'You are very, very good to me, my dear!' said she.

Truly, 'sweet are the uses of adversity!' This worthy couple were beginning to discover—as many have discovered before them —that worldly success—the gauds and superfluities of life, are only won by the sacrifice of much of life's essence. The cares of this world and of a family, and the deceitfulness of wealth and ambition, had choked the tender shoots of sentiment and driven love into abeyance, and, therefore, demonstrations of love into desuetude. It was only now, when they were awaked by the shock of their

calamity, that they perceived how far apart they had drifted, and then they came together again, provoked by something of the warmth of a new affection.

'And now you will see George—won't you?' asked his wife. 'And about Lord Clitheroe!' she said suddenly. 'He's with George. I suppose he must be told?'

'Of course he must!' said Suffield. 'Mustn't he? Are you afraid he'll want to cry off with Phemy?'

'He may,' said his wife, 'though not of himself, I think—but he may, under family pressure.'

The discussion of that matter, and of other matters in their mind, was interrupted by the announcement of the servant that Miss Raynor had called and was in the drawing-room.

'I wanted to speak to you about Bell, by the way,' said Mrs. Suffield. 'She has called

here every day almost since you have been gone, asking how things were going and if you were back yet. I can't make her out. She's so unlike herself—so subdued, so afraid of something, as it were. She hasn't been the same person, it seems to me, since Christmas.'

'Sayst tha?' exclaimed Suffield. 'Dost think she may repent o' her engagement to George? I always thought, tha knows, lass, that Ainsworth was th' man. Poor Bell! It won't do to let her make a mistake! We've had enow o' mistakes in th' family! I must talk to her.'

So they parted then, he to talk to Isabel, and she to make a preliminary statement to Lord Clitheroe, who was sitting by George.

'Well, Bell,' said Suffield as he entered the drawing-room, 'what's this I hear about tha?

Isabel turned palpably pale. 'What,

uncle?' she asked. Then she exclaimed: 'Oh, how changed you are! My poor uncle!'

'Thou'rt changed, too, I hear. Looking ill and worried, I'm told. Let *me* look at tha?'

She submitted to his inspection, and blushed under it.

'What dost blush for?' he said kindly. 'I believe thou'rt turning more of a silly girl than thou ever wert! But tha doesn't look well. Tell me, what's th' matter?'

'I'm really very well, uncle,' said she. 'But I have been troubled about you. How has this business turned out with you, uncle? Aunt has told me something of it.'

He was silent, as if considering what he should say.

'Won't you tell me?' she said.

'Well,' said he, 'things have turned out what would be called "bad"; but somehow their "badness" makes me happier than if

they had turned out better. We'll ha' to give up this house at once, and sell or let the Hall and all about it; we shall be just able to keep th' works going, and so we'll ha' to live in a very economical way in a small house for some years.'

'My poor dear uncle!' exclaimed Isabel.

'Law bless thy heart and soul!' said he, 'I like to think of it! I shall be out of this blessed Parliament business; and I'll go back to real work! And,' he added in a lower tone, as if to himself, 'the wife and I'll be together again!'

'Uncle,' said Isabel, 'I have a request—a petition—to make of you.'

'Say on, my lass,' said Suffield. 'Thou shalt ha' 't, though 'twere th' half o' my poor kingdom.'

'It's a favour I failed to get from you, uncle,' said Isabel, 'a little while ago.'

'What's that?'

'Take this money now! You need it now, if you didn't before! Don't—please, don't!—refuse me again! Dear uncle, you don't know how much you will oblige me, how happy you will make me, by doing as I ask you!'

'Bell, my dear, let's ha' no more o' that! That money's thine, and 'twill be settled upon thee at thy marriage!—Hast seen George, by the way?'

'Yes,' said she with a blush; 'I have seen him. He is changed too.'

'There's a small favour I ha' to ask o' thee, Bell, my dear,' said her uncle, taking her hand. 'I ha' been a kind o' father to you, lass—ha'n't I?'

'Dear uncle, you have been more than a father!—you've been the dearest friend as well!'

'Now I claim th' privilege o' a father and friend. Answer me a question, like a good,

honest girl, as yo' are: Art quite happy in thy engagement to George? Don't be afraid to answer me, my dear!'

Isabel was taken unawares, and was painfully moved; but she kept her self-possession.

'That *is* a question, uncle!' said she. 'But I will not answer it until you have granted me the favour I ask and accepted my money.'

Her uncle shook his head, dropped her hand, and turned away. That had barely happened, when Mrs. Suffield entered to say that George wished to see his father. Isabel said she could not stay longer that night; so she went, and her uncle and aunt went up to George, who was in bed.

Father and son gripped each other's hand and looked into each other's eyes, with perfect understanding of sincere repentance on the one side, and complete forgiveness on the other.

'It has taken it out of you, dad,' said George.

Then his father, having described his difficulties with Gorgonio and the cotton, demanded an account of his son's—and his prospective son-in-law's—adventures.

'Thou'rt more reduced than me, my lad,' said he.

'I'm all right, dad,' answered George. 'I'll be up to-morrow.'

'No, you won't,' said Clitheroe, stroking his big red beard.—'He caught low fever in Spain,' he observed to Suffield; 'the floods were out.'

'You had rather a bad time of it, then?' said Suffield.

'Very bad,' answered Clitheroe, looking at his hairy hands.

'And where are your prisoners?—I suppose you brought them safe?'

'And now,' said Clitheroe, 'they're in safe keeping—the brutes!'

'Hadn't yo' better tell me all about it?' said Suffield.

'Let me ask you this, father,' said George with a smile, 'before Clitheroe begins his story: Can you understand anybody being afraid of your Tame Philosopher and Secretary?—mortally, supernaturally afraid!'

'No,' said Suffield decidedly; 'I certainly cannot.'

'Well, I have found there is such a man; and his name is Daniel Trichinopoly! M'Fie is the one man in England that Daniel fears, or, for the matter of that, I believe, respects. He has a dread of his tremendous speeches, which he can't understand any more than I can, and he thinks him learned enough to be a wizard or something of that kind. I've told you that, father, because, if it hadn't been for Daniel's fear of the Philosopher, we should

never have caught him or the other! He and Tanderjee would have got away a week sooner, and have reached Port Said—where they meant to leave the ship—if Daniel had not been afraid to stir while the Philosopher was weltering in that opium den: he was afraid the spells of the Philosopher would blight his life, if he did not himself release him from that horrible place! And Daniel insisted, in spite of all Tanderjee could say—insisted on staying to release him! So your Philosopher has been of more use than I ever thought he would be.'

'It is certainly most astonishing,' said Suffield. 'But let me hear the whole story.'

Clitheroe then, aided by George at intervals, related their adventures.

They reached Marseilles at midnight of the day after they left London. No regular steamer could possibly reach Gibraltar in time to intercept the 'Travancore'; and both

floods and bandits were said to be out in Spain, so that the train did not seem hopeful either. They therefore resolved to try to hire a fast steam-vessel, and that without delay, or else they would not reach Gibraltar in time. By exceeding good luck—so good that George called it providential—they met on the quay a yachting acquaintance of Clitheroe's, who was waiting for his belated boat to take him on board his steam-yacht outside. To him Clitheroe told their urgent need, and he at once responded by offering to take them to Gibraltar. Therefore, when the boat came, all four entered it: the owner, Clitheroe, and George and the detective. The weather was foul, and they reckoned it would take them all their time to reach Gibraltar by Tuesday, the 'Travancore's' day of call. It was then George showed his prowess and skill as a stoker. He stripped to feed the furnace himself, on a method he had deve-

loped for keeping the fire always bright, and forcing the pace without waste of fuel.

'If everything else failed him,' said Clitheroe, 'he would soon get a place as chief-stoker.' (That was his only allusion to their losses.)

They reached Gibraltar in good time, and had everything in order for the arrest of the fugitives. When the 'Travancore' came in, they boarded her without ostentation. Daniel was nicely caught as he appeared from below to take the air; and Tanderjee had a hand laid on his shoulder as he stood contemplating the great fortified rock: neither, it was clear, had in the least expected that they might be pursued and arrested. Daniel set his arrest down to the evil divinations of the Tame Philosopher. Daniel wished to throw his turban overboard: but George caught it, and found the plans concealed in its folds. The bank draft on Bombay for the six thousand

pounds was found on Tanderjee's person, and in his baggage a considerable number of sovereigns.

'You did very well then, my lad,' said Suffield. 'I was afraid to ask you what success you'd had.'

So they brought their prisoners away in the yacht, without mishap. Daniel's behaviour was singular. He laboured to propitiate George; he was submissive, sweet-tempered, and affable; and he begged that his hands might be left free, even if his legs were tied, so that he might stoke the furnace in place of 'the respectable Sahib George.' But George answered him: 'There is a saying, Daniel, in your own India: "If a man deceives me once, shame on him; if he deceives me twice, shame on me!"' With which words of wisdom Daniel seemed so subdued and humbled that he urged his request no more.

They steamed on for about three days, making but poor progress because of a head-wind. But on the third day a gale arose and grew to a hurricane. They panted and bored through a complete welter and bewilderment of mingled sea and sky. Never, George declared, had he been in such weather, nor had he ever conceived the Mediterranean capable of it. They had been somewhat hugging the Spanish shore, and in their attempt to weather the projecting land between Alicante and Valencia they were driven ashore; but fortunately they drove into a fairly sheltered cove. They passed a terrible night on land, even though after an hour the storm sank almost as suddenly as it had arisen, and though they were able to bring some means of shelter ashore from the yacht. Then they had experience how little Daniel's professions were to be trusted. He and Tanderjee were caught in the night in an

attempt on the persons and purses of George and Clitheroe. (The detective had been left on guard over them, but had succumbed to sleep.) In the morning they found a fishing village; but by then George was alternately shivering and burning with fever. By the close of that first day on land he was helpless and delirious, and they had perforce to remain in such poor accommodation as they could find.

'It was a terrible time,' said George. 'But the Spanish folk were very kind; and I should like to go and see them again some day.'

Meantime the owner of the yacht and his small crew took the vessel back to Alicante for such repairs as she demanded. Those left behind resolved to remain until the return of the yacht; for they were in a wild country, far from a railway—and the safety of railway travelling was still uncertain at best—and George was and would be for days unequal

to the fatigues of a rough journey. At length the yacht returned, and so—and so they returned to Marseilles, and home.

'And all's well that ends well,' said Suffield. 'And now, my dear,' said he to his wife, 'would you and our good friend Clitheroe mind leaving George and me together? I have one or two things I should like to talk to him about.' When the two had withdrawn, 'You've seen Isabel, I suppose, my lad?' said he.

'Yes, father, I've seen her.'

'And what dost think o' her?—her looks, I mean?—Dostna think she looks ill?'

'She doesn't look well, certainly. I suppose she has been worried like the rest of us. Poor Bell! I don't know why our worry should wear her.'

'That's just it,' said his father. 'I don't think "worry" accounts for it. Hast ever noticed anything in her way wi' yo' that

might make yo' think, when yo' consider, that she's not just over head and ears in love wi' yo', my lad?'

'I don't think, dad, she *is* over head and ears; she is very nice and affectionate: I think —I believe—she likes me very much. What more would you have? I don't think Bell is a girl to be over head and ears in love: she is too sensible and wise.'

'That's where, in my opinion,' said his father, 'most o' us are wrong about that girl.—Now, my dear lad, I should be sorry to upset you about nothing; but I think it's best to be frank about this matter I ha' in my mind. Bell is a girl that don't make much fuss about her feelings, but she's got them stronger than most girls. One o' her strongest feelings—I know it: I understand her—is enormous, absurd gratitude to this miserable family for the little we've done for her. It has always troubled her that she had no great

chance to show it. A chance came. Dost know, lad, that twice over she's begged and prayed me to take her money—all o't!—to help us in this business?'

'She pressed it—pressed it hard!—on me that afternoon I went away.'

'There you are!—Now I ha' it borne in on me—I may be wrong; I hope, my lad, for your sake, I am—that her promise to marry you, lad, is part o' that same absurd gratitude! She knew you wanted her; she knew I'd like it; and she saw latterly your mother was not against it! And so, to please us all, thinking little o' herself, she engages herself to marry you, my lad! And now, when she thinks o' th' thing, it looks a more serious business to give herself away like that than she imagined. I'm sure she's got stronger feelings in her than she ever seems to ha' shown to you, lad. I hope to goodness, my dear lad, I'm wrong. But tha dostna

want to mak' another mistake, and tha dostna want, I'm sure, to tak' Bell to wife on those terms. Think it over quietly, lad—speak to Bell about it to-morrow—she'll be here, no doubt—and according as tha finds her, do th' right thing by her and by thysen!'

George was pale and agitated. 'All right, father. I'll think it over. You'd better leave me alone now, dad.'

'God bless tha, lad,' said his father, with a quiver of the lip, 'and gi'e thee a brave heart!'

George lay still—wretchedly still!—for a little while; and then suddenly he jumped from bed and hurriedly dressed, weak and trembling though he was. In a few minutes he slipped down-stairs, passed from the house, and called a cab. He must see Bell! He could not wait!

# CHAPTER XLII

## THE BURDEN ROLLS AWAY

THAT evening Isabel had accorded Alan Ainsworth an interview, with the resolution to see him no more again for a long time; they were in an *impasse*, she urged; nothing could be done at present; George was in a condition in which it would be mean and cruel to trouble him; therefore, she pleaded that Alan should seek no more to see her until the situation was much more propitious.

'But, you see, dear heart,' said Alan, 'that our difficulty must remain locked so long as we keep back the key of it.'

'I know, Alan, I know!' said she. 'But,

when I saw George looking so broken down with his journey, and so ashamed of his mistakes, how could I say what I had meant to say? To beat down an already bruised spirit!—to add a crueller stroke, perhaps, than any he had yet endured!—no, I could not do that! And then to have it thought that I had said what I had said because he is a ruined man!'

'No one who knows you, Isabel,' said he, 'would ever think that! The fear of that may be dismissed. No doubt, it will be painful to Suffield to hear what must be said. But after all, my own dear, it *must* be said—must it not?—and every day's delay makes the saying only harder. And there are critical operations which it is kinder to perform at once, however ill able a man may seem to bear them.'

'I suppose there are,' said she. 'I know it is said there are. But it seems to me,

Alan, that you have not much pity for George.'

'Don't say that, Isabel. If he loves you at all as I do, I know how terribly he will feel when he is told he must give you up. It will be like the very prospect—the pang!—of death! The world will seem to end!—the whole universe to rush to chaos!'

'Do you love me so much, then?'

'I love you, my love,' said he, 'as I love my life.'

'But,' said she, with a spark of her old spirit, 'does not a true lover say to his mistress that he loves her better than life?'

'That, my sweetheart,' said he, 'is the nonsense, the hyperbole, of love. I wish you to live, and myself to live also, that we may live together; therefore, I love you as my life.'

'Yes, love!' said she. 'Give me your hand, that I may feel strong. Poor George!

—I am a foolish, weak woman! I never thought I was!—Did you ever think I was?'

'You are not, my love!' said he. 'This is a very difficult and trying time for you!—it would be for the strongest woman! It is your strength—your true strength—that makes you feel and behave as if you were weak!—the strength of your affections, the strength of your pity for George, and the strength of your regard for your uncle and aunt!—Another woman without your strength and tenderness would disregard or sweep away these feelings, and, in her absolutely selfish weakness, appear strong.'

'Yes,' said she, 'I think you are right!—I hope you are!—Tell me, love, I am not weak, and then I shall be strong!'

'Let me help you in this, my sweetheart,' said he. 'Let me go to George and ask him to release you. It is only right that I should do that, since it is I who have put you in the

wrong with him—with my obstinate folly in trying to make a position before I spoke to you!'

'It seems to me very mean,' said she, 'to put you as a kind of buffer between him and myself. I don't think I can do that, Alan dear. At any rate let me go to my aunt first and tell her all. Don't you think that will be best?'

'I think, dear, that will be a good thing to do,' he answered.

'She may be harder than my uncle would have been,' said Isabel; 'but she is a woman, and she may better understand—especially since she was not at all anxious, a year ago, that I should marry George. I will go to her to-morrow, then.'

'And you will tell her, sweetheart, all that *must* be told—won't you?'

'I will.'

At that moment the maid-servant announced 'Mr. Suffield,' and turning their

heads, they saw George standing in the doorway. They held each other's hand. Isabel's impulse was to snatch her hand away; but Alan held it, and still held it tight as they rose together to receive George. The meaning of the situation was so unmistakable that none of the three said a word for an instant. At length George spoke. 'May I ask you, Mr. Ainsworth, to leave my cousin and me alone a little while?'

'I should like to have a word with you before you go, Mr. Suffield,' said Ainsworth. 'I shall be in the dining-room.'

'May I sit down, Bell?' said George, when Ainsworth had gone.

'Sit, George! Sit!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, why have you come out, weak and ill as you are?'

'My father told me,' said he, 'something under which I couldn't rest: I had to get up and come to you, Bell! He suspects I have made another mistake!—that I have got you

to promise to be my wife without getting your proper love! Is that true, Bell? Answer me, dear!'

'I have done you a great wrong,' said she. 'I have committed a blunder—a shameful blunder—for which I ought to be punished. I am ashamed of myself, George, and—I have to ask your forgiveness!'

He looked on her with uncontrollable longing and pain; but he said nothing.

'I have led you to believe,' she continued, 'that I loved you enough to marry you!—I love you, George; but not enough!—not in that way!—not as you ought to be loved by a wife!—But if you wish me to keep my promise, I will keep it!'

He still had his eyes fixed on her; but he said nothing. She slipped to her knees by him and hid her face on his knee, while she took his hand. He drew his hand quickly away—it was the only sign he gave of resent-

ment—and they remained thus silent for some moments.

'It is Ainsworth?' said he, at length.

'Yes,' she answered.

There was another pause; and then he put his hand in Isabel's; she kissed it.

'You forgive me, then?' said she, raising her eyes to meet his.

'Forgive you, Bell?' said he quietly, though there was a fevered light in his eye. 'We won't use that word. I am sure you meant me only kindness!'

'I did, George!—I did!'

'It has been all a mistake, I can see,' he continued. 'It is a good thing that this has happened now. If it had happened a month ago, I don't know how I would have taken it! I take it now quietly, you see,' he said with a wry smile.

'Oh, don't, George!' she exclaimed. 'Don't talk so bitterly!'

'It is bitter to lose you, Bell,' said he—'but, no; I won't complain! I had no business to think of marrying!—I was no more than a conceited boy fresh from school!—I have discovered I am only a boy!—not fit to be trusted with anything!—And when I am well, I am going to make a new start!—as you will, Bell!'

'And you will let me be good to you, my poor George!' said Isabel.

'For Heaven's sake, don't pity me, Bell!' he exclaimed. 'I can't stand it!—Give me one kiss, Bell!' She kissed him: now that she felt the close bond that had bound them was dissolved, she could do that without reluctance. 'It is over!' said he. 'But, Bell, you mustn't ask me to see *him* yet awhile! Tell him I understand what he would say!—I don't blame him!—but I can't see him!'

And so in haste he took his hat and went

away. Isabel turned to find Ainsworth in the dining-room.

'It is over, Alan,' said she, when she had delivered George's message. 'And I feel mean and ashamed. Please leave me, dear. I cannot bear to talk now!'

And he also went away, and left Isabel alone.

Next day she went again to Rutland Gate, desperately resolved to have her way with her uncle in the matter of the money. He was out—gone to see the Padiham agent about the surrender of the house—but her aunt was in her room, and sent word that she wished to see her. Isabel found her emptying boxes and wardrobes preparatory to the migration to Lancashire. She blamed Isabel for having almost frightened the life out of her when she had found her son had gone out the previous night; and she was in a generally resentful mood.

'It is strange, Bell,' said she, 'that you should not have known your own mind when you gave George your promise!'

'It was my own heart I did not know, aunt.'

'Mind or heart, it comes to the same thing.'

'I deceived myself. I thought I could marry George without the complete love you should have for the man you will spend your life with.'

'Fiddle-de-dee!' said her aunt impatiently. 'What should a girl know of the complete love you talk about?'

'The nature God has given you,' replied Isabel, 'will tell you that, if you are not too foolish to understand it.'

'No, it won't, Bell,' said her aunt, 'however hard you listen. Only being in love can teach you that—if not with one man, then with another. And you have known Alan

Ainsworth long enough, and surely you have known him well enough, to have understood all about the necessity of your complete love before you gave your promise to George?'

'I did understand,' said she humbly. 'But I thought he did not care for me. He was only holding back because of my wretched money, and because he wanted to make a position of his own first!—Why are you so hard, aunt? Why do you make it so difficult for me to tell you about it?'

'Hard, Bell? You talk like a silly girl! If I am hard, it is because I am a woman and can understand! I do not blame you for having fallen in love with Mr. Ainsworth; I blame you for getting yourself engaged to my son while you were really in love with the other man! It is for that I blame you!'

'I am to blame. I do not seek to excuse myself. But I cannot help thinking, aunt, that if George and I had got engaged to each

other a year ago, you would have been very glad to hear we had broken the engagement off as quickly as now!'

Her aunt looked at her angrily; but Isabel endured the look, and it fell.

'You are a wicked girl to think so!—much more to say so!' said her aunt.

'And why, aunt,' said Isabel, 'is it wicked to speak the truth? It is not always kind or right to speak the truth, but you have driven me now to speak it!'

'Driven you? Because I have said you were to blame for engaging yourself to my son when you cared for another man? Because I feel for my son when you have bruised him when he's already crushed?'

'No, aunt! It is not that!—it is not that!—It is none of these things! You know it is not! It is that you are hard and unsympathetic! You are a woman, and a mother; you feel for your son, but you feel nothing

for me!—you do not care what may become of me!—And do I not feel for George? The pain of the pain I must give him has been upon me for days and days!—But you do not understand! You do not care to understand! —You are not interested in me! You never were! You never loved me, aunt! Never!'

'You were always a rebellious child, Bell! And now you wag an ungrateful and wicked tongue!'

But Isabel was now stricken with distress. Her strained feelings had given way and produced these jangling plaints, and she trembled with the excitement of them.

'Forgive me, aunt!' said she. 'It is indeed wicked and ungrateful to talk to you like that!—I don't know what has come to me!—But, oh, you do not know what I have endured for days!—Forgive me, dear!'

She impulsively embraced her aunt, who leaned her head on her shoulder and wept.

'Oh, wicked, wicked creature that I am!' cried Isabel. 'But why, dear, why were you so hard with me? Why would you not understand how it had come about?'

And these two women embraced and kissed each other, and understood each other better in that hour than they had all their lives before.

'I must see Uncle George,' said Isabel, when the emotions of both had been assuaged somewhat. 'I wonder if he is come in?'

Her aunt made inquiry; found he had returned, and told Isabel he was waiting for her in the library.

'Well, my lass,' said he, when she had entered the library and he had closed the door.

Her self-control gave way utterly, and she threw herself sobbing into her uncle's arms.

'There, my lass!—there!' he murmured, patting her shoulder. 'Thou'rt wi' thy owd

uncle, and he cannot find it in his heart to blame tha!—though 'twould ha' saved a lot o' trouble and cryin' if things had gone straight for'ard, instead o' comin' right in this hind-foremost kind o' way. But it's come right now, and we mun be as good friends as ever. Ainsworth's a good lad; and if you love him and he loves you, you're both set in th' right way.—And George, of course—well, George has got to open a new account all round: that's only right, after all.—Well now, my lass, about this money. Sit tha down, and let's ha' it out.'

'You must take it, uncle!' said Isabel, drying her eyes. 'Please! If you want me to live happily, you must take it!'

'Suppose,' said Suffield, 'I take the money over and pay thee a percentage?'

'No, no, uncle!' she cried. 'It must be yours wholly and entirely!—I never want to see anything of it again, or to hear of it!'

'It's queer,' meditated he, 'how thou dost hate that money! I wonder now if there was anything odd about th' way Harry got it?—However, thou sayst a percentage won't do. No.—But what, lass, if this money should be as unlucky to me as it has been to thee?'

'It won't be, uncle!' said she. 'It cannot be! You are a good man, and you will use it well and wisely.'

'I don't know,' said he, 'that that'll make any difference. Nevertheless, I suppose I must risk it.—But what the dickens,' he demanded, 'art tha going to do without it?'

'I suppose,' said she with a deep blush, 'we shall be married soon.'

'Of course, of course,' said her uncle. 'And *he* wants tha to gi'e this money up?'

'He does, of course,' answered Isabel.

'Ah, he's young yet,' said he, 'he's young. —But what about thy father's keep at that place?'

'We hope he needn't stay longer than the year; but in any case Alan wishes to pay it.'

'And thy Aged?'

'Among us we will manage that too—Alan and others.'

'Seems to me,' said her uncle, 'that's rather hard on Alan. A man might as well start wi' a family. Howsoever, these things'll get his hand into th' way o' extra expense: they'll be o' use to him that way.—Well, I suppose thou must ha' thy way wi' thy owd uncle, as thou always did.'

'Dear uncle,' said she, 'how kind and iudulgent you have always been!'

'Well, lass, I'll take this over for two or three years. By the end o' that time thou'lt ha' learned th' value o' money better, wi' one thing and another, and may be glad to ha' it back.'

'Never, uncle, never!' she protested.

'You must take it for good and all, for better or worse.'

'Well, Isabel, my lass, I never was so unwilling to do anything for tha. But thou wilt ha' thy way.—I'll tak' and use th' money till thou dost ask for it back.'

'If I am wilful, uncle,' said Isabel with a smile, 'you are obstinate. But let us leave it as you say—leave it till I ask for it back.—I am really very grateful to you, uncle! You have done me a great favour! You have taken a terrible load off me!'—Just then, a beam of the afternoon sun, passing by the lofty and supercilious lords of Padiham, shed its gentle, wintry radiance on these two.—'It is a good omen!' exclaimed Isabel. 'Say, uncle dear, that it is!—Forgive me, dear, all the wrong I have done! And kiss me!'

Suffield was moved. He said nothing; but

he put his kindly hand on his niece's head, and there was blessing in the act.

'How is it you two always get on so well together?' said Mrs. Suffield, who entered at that moment.

'Tha knows, Bell,' said Suffield, taking his wife's hand, 'I believe she begins to be jealous in her old age.'

'Old age!' exclaimed his wife. 'Speak for yourself, George!'

Isabel went to her aunt and embraced her. 'You forgive me, then?' she murmured.—Her aunt's answer was a caress and a kiss.—'I will come again before you go,' added Isabel, 'to see Phemy.'

And thus in mutual forgiveness and reconciliation ended the stress and storm which, with minds less just and generous and hearts less tender and true, might have resulted in estrangement and hatred.

# CHAPTER XLIII

## DISSOLVING VIEWS

Thus Isabel stepped from her proud position as the courted heiress, and divested herself of her 'gold and jewels,' her 'silver and pearls.' When her aunt took her departure for Lancashire—Mr. Suffield having still to remain in town for a day or two—Isabel met her at the station with a small box, which she enjoined her aunt to take great care of and not to open till she was in her own North. That box contained the jewellery of rare foreign workmanship which Uncle Harry had left: so resolved was she to be rid of all she could be rid of that had belonged to Uncle Harry. She tried to be rid also of the

furniture and other things that had been bought with Uncle Harry's money; but Ainsworth had thought it was a pity that her pretty home should be broken up, and he had suggested a compromise. He had gone to Mr. Suffield and proposed himself to pay for the things. But Suffield had been so angry at the suggestion, and had so obstinately declared that if he heard any more of it he would have nothing to do with the money at all, that the matter was allowed to drop. Then Isabel sweetly asked Ainsworth why the flat should be given up: would it not do as a dwelling for both of them?

'And then,' said she, 'then I shall feel as if I had brought you something—a very little something!—besides myself and the cares I took upon myself.'

And then Ainsworth, greatly daring, asked, since the dwelling was ready and since she was now—or soon would be—a mere

spinster without an income, why they should not prepare to join hands and purses as soon as possible?

So it came to pass that an early day in spring was fixed for their wedding. Isabel went to see her father with the uncertain design of asking him to perform the usual office of a father on such an occasion, and 'give her away'; but his sequestered life on the Surrey hills seemed so serene, he was so occupied with his 'Defence of Transcendentalism,' and he showed so remote an interest in what she told him of herself, that she thought it was a pity to disturb his equable leisure.

'I am delighted to hear it, my child,' said he. 'Marriage, with love, is the completing of a woman; so she fulfils the law of her being. You should read Luther on marriage, my dear. He has given the most beautiful picture of the nature and ends and duties of

the wedded life you are ever likely to read.'

That was all he said; and so he turned again to his 'Defence of Transcendentalism.' Isabel, therefore, turned to her uncle: who but he—the kind and indulgent nourisher of her youth and friend of her maturer years—her all but father—should give her away? He was asked, and at once agreed, to perform the paternal office; and so Isabel went down to Lancashire to fulfil the time before her wedding, for she desired to be married from her uncle's house.

Meanwhile Mr. Suffield had been getting through the business for which he stayed behind in London. He had arranged with the Whip of his party to resign his seat and to pair for the session. One important division he could not be paired for, and he remained a day or two longer than he had intended, to perform his duty to his party.

There was another debate on Indian affairs—it concerned Opium this time—and his secretary, the Tame Philosopher, had prevailed on him to make a speech. He had written for him a most learned discourse, packed with words of the peculiarly Tame-Philosophic kind. Suffield sat down for a little in the Library of the House of Commons and wrinkled his brows over the sheets, but his thoughts would wander after his family and his affairs into Lancashire.

'I can make nought o' this!' he said, and rose, folding the sheets away in his pocket.

He went down into the House, and promising himself that he would not miss the night-train home, he sat and listened in a half-dazed condition to the droning and the buzzing, and grew weary of it all. One of the Whips of his party came to him and asked him if he meant to carry out the desire he had expressed to speak on the question.

'Nay,' said he; 'I ha' nought to say. But I'll vote.'

Still he sat, and still the debate drawled and mumbled on—with an occasional screech or two—till eleven o'clock struck. There was no sign that the division was at hand; and he went to the Whip and begged that he might be paired for the division, because he must hurry down to Lancashire on business. The Whip looked coldly on him, but acceded to his request; and Suffield walked out of the House never to enter it again.

In the lobby he encountered the Tame Philosopher, hanging about in expectation of hearing his own rhapsodical and bombastical periods delivered by his patron.

'You are not going away!' he exclaimed in dismay.

'I am,' answered Suffield, cramming his oration into his hands. 'Thou'rt th' only man that can fitly deliver that fine com-

position. Keep it, my friend. This question, if I'm not mistaken, 'll come up again, and then thou mayst be in th' House thysen, and canst deliver it.'

He drove away to the station—he had brought his travelling bag to the House—and caught his train to the North. He entered a sleeping-carriage, and quickly put himself to bed. And as the train rolled away through the soft night, charged with premonitory whiffs and whispers of spring, the unbidden refrain kept rolling through and through his mind :

> O the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birken tree,
> They all are growing green in my ain countree.

And at length he went to sleep, to awake in his own Lancashire.

And so the interest of our story fades from London ; for the Tame Philosopher soon followed his patron back to the North—he could not live, he declared, 'without the

solace of seeing my dear George Suffield, a true man's-a-man-for-a'-that'—and Doughty's existence was regularly merged now in Ainsworth's, the interest of whose life was now in Lancashire. Gorgonio was heard of no more; and as for Tanderjee and the blameless Daniel, they had fitting punishments meted out to them at the Lancashire spring assizes for felony and for obtaining money on false pretences.

. . . . .

But before we say adieu to the excellent family that has largely figured in this story, let us see how they were affected by the revolution in their circumstances. They dwelt no longer in the noble old Holdsworth Hall: that had been let to a Dutch-German-French Jew who gambled successfully on the Stock Exchange. They lived in a modest, old-fashioned house on the border of the village which Suffield had built, George

having rooms of his own in town, to be always in supervision of the city part of the business.

Isabel—who lived in her uncle's house till her marriage—could not but note with delight how he and her aunt renewed their youth. Both might have been held somewhat excused if they had expressed or shown regret for their lost wealth and position, and resentment against the necessity for returning to work, when they had thought that work was over, according to the doleful habit of people who have been 'reduced'; but neither of them behaved as the foolish people behave. They were busy, cheery, and harmonious by day, and by night they were wrapped in the peaceful and profound sleep of the just and merciful. Suffield was up and into the works as early in the morning as his workpeople; and Mrs. Suffield was up not much later, and with her daughter and her maid-of-all-work setting her house in order and preparing breakfast.

It was to Isabel a delightful and stimulating lesson in life to see how her aunt, the courageous, vigorous-minded woman who had held her own with duchesses and female politicians in 'the gilded saloons of greatness,' shone with all the virtues of the house-mother in the little Lancashire home, and was evidently at peace with herself and with the world.

'Of such,' thought Isabel, 'must be the women who have made Englishmen great with their peculiar quality of greatness!'

And it was not at home only that her aunt was active and helpful; she was also helpful and active in the village among her husband's people; for Suffield was not one of those employers who consider that their responsibility for their workers is at an end with the payment of their weekly wages. There were particularly gaffers and gammers upon whom the cold of Death was gradually creeping while yet they lived, who needed such comfort

and encouragement as a wise woman can best impart: cheering words, and comforting food and drink. Isabel knew these pensioners from of old, who had so long benefited by the Suffield bounty that they had come to think they had a prescriptive right to the care of 'th' mester,' as most people think they have a right to the regard of Providence. Isabel went among these ancient, quaint creatures alone sometimes, and then she heard how her uncle and aunt were regarded by them.

'Aw'm real glad,' said one grey gaffer to her, who was ancient enough to wear knee-breeches and coarse stockings, 'th' missus ha' come back—though they do say as how it's because th' mester ha' lost lots o' brass. Brass or no brass, hoo [she] is a rare un to mak' broth.—I set on my lass and owd Betsy to try to mak' th' broth; but, bless thee! they conna mak' it nohow.—Aw reckon th' missus has a special kind o' barley.'

Of 'th' mester' she heard more sympathetic commendation still. She visited an old woman supposed to be dying, who had in her time worked very hard and borne a large family of great sons, and who had known 'th' mester's' mother.

'Ay, aw knowed th' mester's mother,' said she to Isabel, while an attentive neighbour sat by—'as clean and nate a woman as could be, and as bonny and free-handed as th' mester himsen. When aw sit down i' th' Kingdom o' Heaven, aw'll ha' a good look round for th' mester's mother, to tell her how well th' mester's going on. Happen, aw'll clap e'en on her sitting right again' me; for we're fro' th' same village.'

'Happen,' said her neighbour, almost as old and quaint a creature as herself—'happen thou'lt gi'e a look round and find out my owd John and tell him about Betsy.'

'Nay,' said the other; 'aw'll do nought o'

th' sort!—Trapesing round to look for thy owd John! When aw get to th' Kingdom, aw'll just put me on a clean apron, and sit me down in th' first cheer, and rest me!—But aw'll look out for th' mester's mother!'

. . . . .

Thus work, peace, and contentment reigned in the Suffield home and throughout the village which Suffield had created and which depended on him. The only person who seemed at all sad and who occasionally sighed was Euphemia. And it presently became evident what was troubling her: not reduced circumstances, not the necessity of putting on an apron and performing the duties of a parlour-maid, but because her 'Beast' seemed to have ridden away, and because since she had not seen him her mind turned him into a Prince. When her father had to announce to Lord Clitheroe their contracted circumstances, she bravely—but with no terrible pang of

heart—offered Clitheroe his liberty. He refused to accept it, although he anticipated that his father and mother would strongly object to his carrying out his engagement; he declared, however, he would wait and 'lie low' —by which he meant 'bide his time'—until the not very distant day when his invalid old father must slip out of the title and estates. From that day, Phemy had not seen or heard from her 'Beast,' and she began to think he must have ridden away indeed. Then, since she had not seen him dancing attendance on her, she had begun to long for his presence, and at length to be convinced that she loved him and was going to lose him—such being the wayward fashion of love with maidens of Euphemia's character.

But on a certain day a tall horseman with a big flaming-red beard, and a piece of crape on his arm, rode up to the Suffield door and alighted. It was the 'Beast-Prince' come to

claim his bride: his old father was dead, and he had stepped into the empty shoes and inherited the empty title, and by right of his freedom now to do as he pleased he had come to his lady-love. Euphemia welcomed him with more demureness and at the same time with more fervour than she had ever before shown.

'Well, little one,' said he, 'you see I've come, now that I am free to do as I like.'

'I see you have come,' said she, with something of her old sauciness: 'you are a very noticeable fact;' but she refrained from calling him 'Beast' or 'Goose.'

'Come now,' said he; 'have you missed me at all? Tell me.'

'A little,' she answered; 'not much.' But her look was better than her words.

They were closeted together for a little, and then they came forth radiant. The new Earl of Padiham congratulated Isabel on her

approaching marriage—of which, he said, he had just heard—and regretted that his own could not be celebrated at the same time. And so he rode away, and left Phemy as merry as a bird in the waking of dawn.

. . . . .

So almost before Isabel was aware—with these events and with preparations for the wedding—her marriage day was at hand. It seemed to suddenly leap out of the future into the present! Three days before it seemed still very distant; two days before it seemed only one day nearer than it had been the day before; then the gulf seemed to contract and disappear, and lo! they were at the morning of the very day, and Ainsworth was by her side!

George was absent: he had gone for a holiday; but he wrote a manly letter to Isabel, begging her to believe that he

stayed away from her wedding because of no feeling of estrangement, but only because he thought that his presence might embarrass the whole party. And with that he wished her and her husband—about to be—'happiness and prosperity.' The letter was simple and honest, and strove hard to be rid of all trace of self-pity or wounded vanity.

Suffield had declared a holiday at the works on the wedding day; and there was a great concourse in the church on that August morning, when the worthy man with tears in his eyes gave his niece away, and anon greeted her as 'Mrs. Ainsworth.' But the most notable fact in connection with the wedding is that Mrs. Suffield's wedding present to her niece was that very box, containing Uncle Harry's jewels and trinkets, which Isabel had turned over to her aunt not many weeks before.

And then—and then the married pair drove away into the new life which lay before them—the life of husband and wife, with its new cares and new burdens, its new duties and new responsibilities.

THE END.

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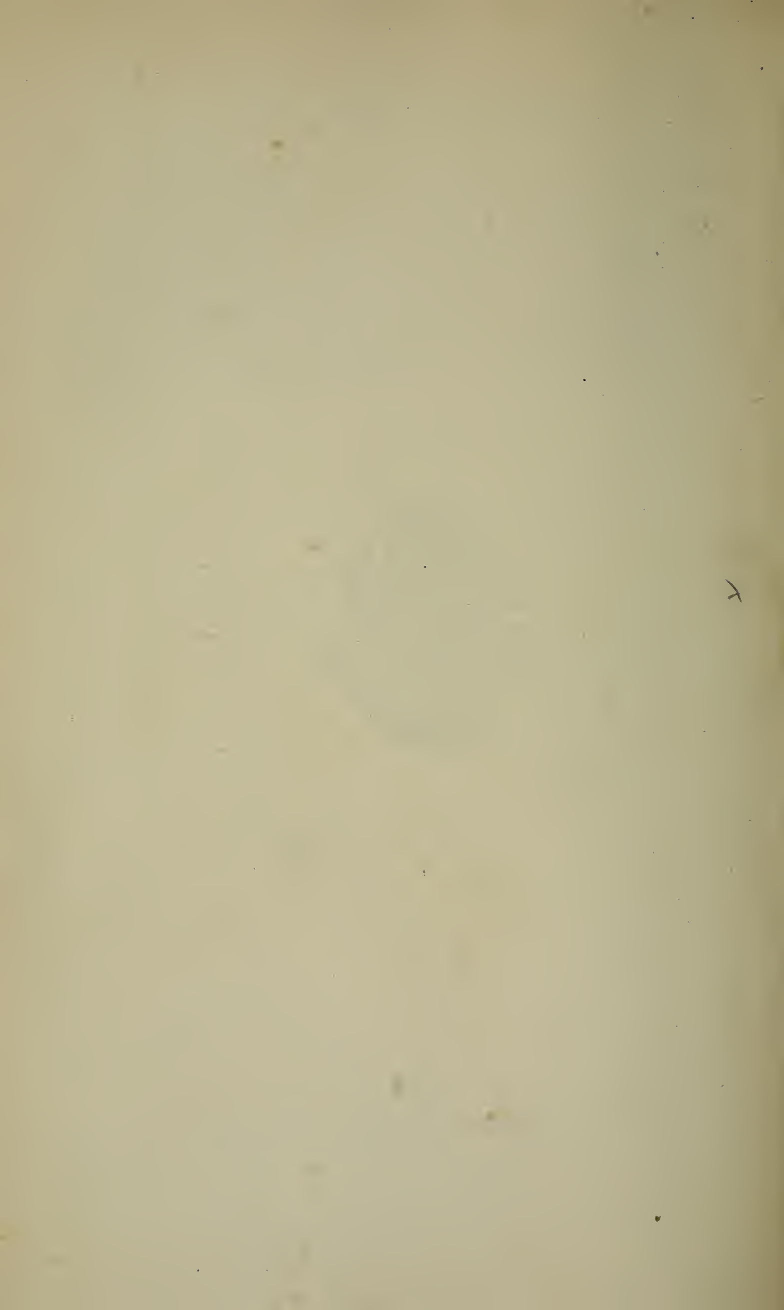

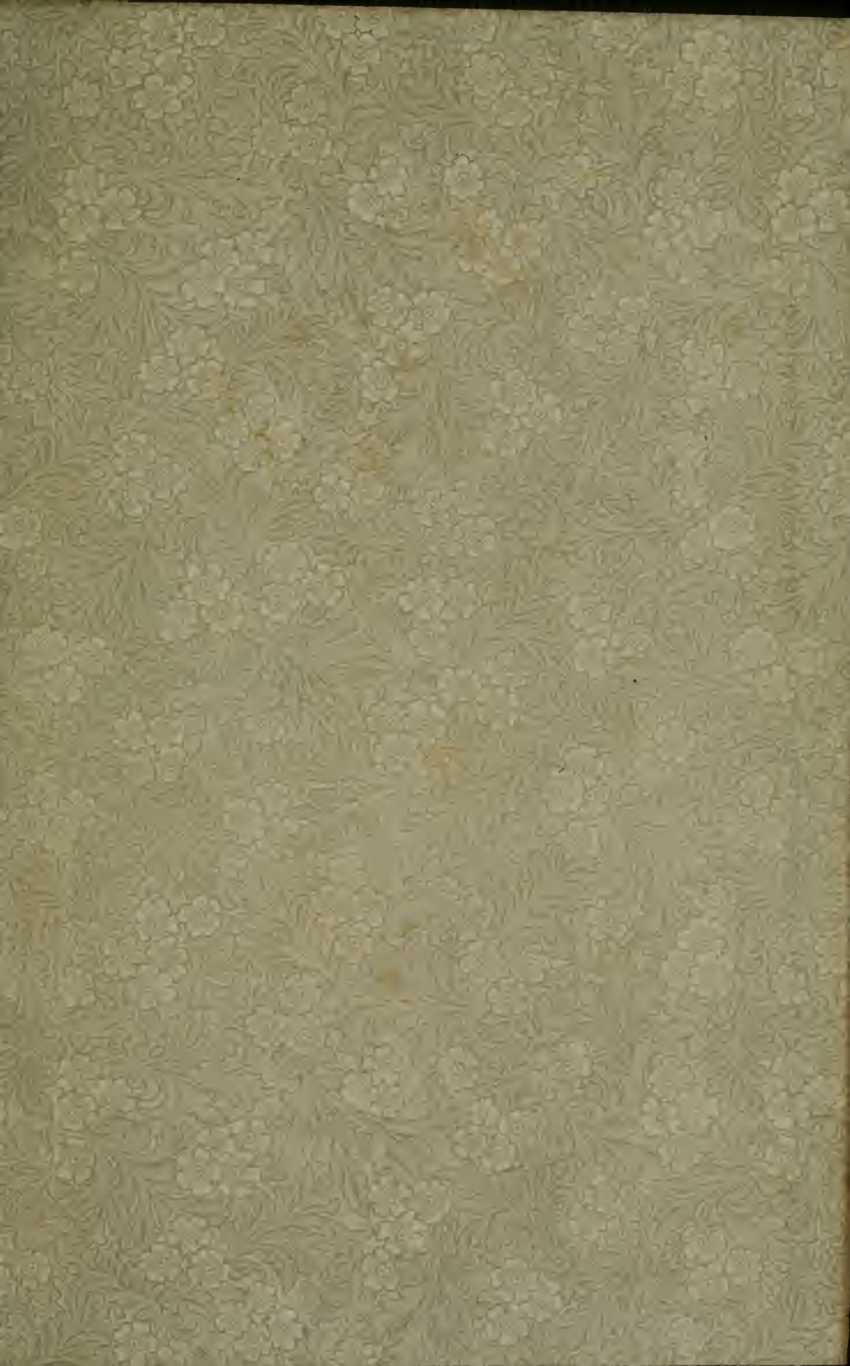

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